

FROM HOME and EXILE:

A Negotiation of
Ideas about Home in
Malawian Poetry

Joanna Woods

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

From Home and Exile: A Negotiation of Ideas about Home in Malawian Poetry

Joanna Woods



Langa Research & Publishing CIG
Mankon, Bamenda

Publisher

Langaa RPCIG

Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group

P.O. Box 902 Mankon

Bamenda

North West Region

Cameroon

Langaagrp@gmail.com

www.langaa-rpcig.net

Distributed in and outside N. America by African Books Collective

orders@africanbookscollective.com

www.africanbookscollective.com

ISBN: 9956-792-77-2

© Joanna Woods 2015

DISCLAIMER

All views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Langaa RPCIG.

Table of Contents

Abstract Note.....	v
Map.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
a) Home and Exile.....	1
b) Discussion.....	5
c) Chapter Overview.....	7
Chapter 2: Methods and Multiple Spaces of Study.....	9
a) My Research.....	9
b) Limitations and Delimitations.....	14
Chapter 3: Home, Exile and The Self: The Negotiation of Concepts.....	21
a) Ideas about Home.....	21
b) Ideas about Exile and the Memory of Home.....	30
c) Theory of the Subject: Ideas about the Self.....	41
Chapter 4: The Context: Malawi as place, its history and its people.....	51
a) Malawi.....	51
b) The Poets.....	66
Felix Mnthali.....	66
Frank Chipasula.....	68
Jack Mapanje.....	69
Lupenga Mphande.....	71
Steve Chimombo.....	71

Chapter 5: The Poetry: An Interpretation of a Selection of Poems by the Named Malawian Poets..... 73

Conclusion: A Reflection on Research Findings and Spaces of Study..... 139

a) On Interpretation: Using Poetry, Interview Material and Fieldwork..... 139

i) Literature as a means of constructing ‘home’..... 140

ii)Exploring interview material and fieldwork for research..... 142

b) Research Findings: – Being in Place and being without place: constructing a relationship with home..... 144

c) Concluding Remarks 148

Appendix.....149

a) The Poems..... 149

b) Malawian Myths.....208

Bibliography..... 211

Abstract Note

For me, ideas about home first came into play when I journeyed to Malawi and created a home for myself there. At that time, not only did the childhood place, back among family and friends in the United Kingdom, and the newly discovered place, under mango and jacaranda canopies and adorned by communal ardour on the foot of Mulanje Mountain, illuminate themselves as home, but my writing and the imagined spaces of home also came into being. General literary enthusiasm carried me to research the literature of the newfound home place, and it was from there that questions began about what 'home' meant to the people who had surrounded me in Malawi.

~

While this book is about home, at the heart of it is Malawi and its poetry. The aim is to negotiate ideas about home as expressed through Malawian poetry written in English. From experiences of exile, engendered by the oppressive regime of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda between 1966 and 1994, the selected Malawian poets – Felix Mnthali, Frank Chipasula, Jack Mapanje, Lupenga Mphande, and Steve Chimombo – effectively converse with home and reflect on its transformations in their work. Although Steve Chimombo did not flee Malawi or stay in exile, he is still of remarkable importance to this discussion.

Research into poetry from Malawi is largely shaped by exploration of the country's politics. In this book, I make an attempt to position poetic analysis somewhere other than in a political remit; I move away from readings construed from a political agenda to show more of a cultural sensibility in poems from Malawi. If written poetry in Malawi is frequently

presented in dense codes, employing cryptic language and structure, cultural aesthetics in the poetry, such as oral literatures, implants a sense of a collective Malawian sensibility of home.

While 'home' is tangled with the physical place and the imagined space of Malawi, the poets make a resounding case for literature itself and its significant standing as a home. Insofar as the poetry is fashioned as personal endeavour, the literary text creates a home for the 'self'.

It has been assumed that exile is a terrible challenge for the individual. I argue that through literary endeavour and creativity it may rather reveal itself as a constructive experience in terms of negotiating ideas about home:

Understanding is born not of transcendence but displacement.

(Jackson 1995: 157)

The approach is one of analysing expressions of home in poetry written from the experience of exile; it is not about the place of exile, nor is it an analysis of a southern African experience. Ultimately, the poems form a foundation upon which to speak of the context: Malawi.

Map



Note on Map: This map shows Malawi and its neighbouring countries in south-eastern Africa. The star indicates the position of Lilongwe, the country's capital city. The map also points to Nyika Plateau¹ in the northern region;

¹'Nyika NP' –National Park – on the map.

Zomba Plateau and Mount Mulanje in the southern Shire; and, just north of Zomba, the tip of the Lake which stretches on up into Malawi's' north.²

²Map retrieved from: <http://www.worldofmaps.net/en/africa/map-malawi/map-regions-malawi.htm> on 18 October 2013.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Home and Exile

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul.

(Weil 1949; 2002: 43)

When we think of home we imagine being rooted, safe and secure in our surrounding environment. We conceive of being in place. Since antiquity, the quest for that place in which one feels at home has pervaded literature and literary theory throughout the world. As Simone Weil (1949) suggests, it is part of the human condition to need to consider our physical rootedness. Since literary study concerns itself with a basic interest in humanity, it fits that ideas about home are well represented across the literary landscape. Malawi, then, is no exception to this rule. As in many other countries, until modern technologies ushered in a new era of preserving literary texts, bodies of literature in Malawi existed in forms other than print. These forms included spoken word, folk stories, myth, riddles and songs marked the beginning of tales about home.

However, the idea of home is complex. As Naficy (1999) suggests, the key concept of home is accompanied by its partners ‘house’ and ‘homeland’. But home is also conceptualised beyond the physical manifestation of a house; it implies more than the “literal object, the material place in which one lives”. In this conceptualization, home “moves

from the literal to the abstract”. Home is carried by memory and “by acts of imagination” (Nacify 1999: 5-6); it can therefore be construed as a construct of the mind as well as manifesting in the physical realm. While we might wish for some concrete meaning to hold on to, in short, home needs to be conceived on numerous and varying levels. We cannot demand consistency when home and its meaning forever changes; it has “become everywhere and nowhere, abstract and ethereal... like the sky” (Jackson 1995: 35, 49).

Owing to temporality, acts of memory are integral to ideas about home. Indeed, place is “coloured by memory” (Watson, in Field, Meyer and Swanson 2007: vii). Even individuals who remain in one home all their lives construct ideas¹ and have feelings about home which can be separated from its physical architecture. But the abstract idea of home may well be more fervently thought of in relation to situations of displacement. Far from being void of home, the word ‘exile’ is indelibly connected to home. In fact, to be away from one’s physical home rather heightens the possibility of fathoming ‘home’ in different ways:

“in order to be able to interpret the world around us and relate it to the world within, one has to achieve a distance by removing oneself from it in exile”

(Lutsky, in Gutthy 2009: 73).

Thinking of home as “two landscapes –one outside of the self, the other within” offers some comfort to exiles in considering that removal from the physical lends to home being kept in alternative ways (Lopez, in Jackson 1995: 16). Through a “kaleidoscope of imaginings and remembering”,

¹Which, having been made, are then subject to change.

ideas about home are shaped and re-shaped by people's experiences of it (Field and Swanson 2007: 8).

In exile the need to manage the idea of home in other, perhaps more expressive, ways is provoked by individual 'selves'. Thus, contrapuntally entwined with ideas about home are impressions and reflections of the 'self'. This book takes its starting point from such an idea, suggesting that, while home is inherently tied to the idea of place, it may also be rooted in other eminent dimensions – in the realm of creativity, reflected in literary work tied to human experience.² Here I wish to briefly emphasise that the term 'self', rather than a public collective, is meant to consider a more individual realm of inner emotion and personal experience, which might be said to exist in a domain of existentialist cultural thinking. It is the Poet as individual, subject, or 'self' that I am ultimately analysing here.

Home is "constructed from differing vantage points in time and space" (Field and Swanson 2007: 8). Created by many individuals, a given society will comprise manifold interpretations of home. Where a society is wrought by exile, as Malawi is, home becomes ever more interesting and diversely experienced and explored. As a contention of this book, and similar to the concept of 'home', exile manifests itself separately from the physical, in ways that are psychological or emotional. The point is to focus on the *experience*, not the place, of exile. Malawi's politics were temperamental and dangerous during the time in which the

²When repudiating the label "dissident writer", and warning against political reductionist readings of his work, Milan Kundera said that "the importance of...art does not lie in the fact that it pillories this or that political regime, but that, on the strength of social and human experience... its offers new testimony about mankind"(in Lutsky, in Gutthy 2009: 105).

poetry I examine was written. Under a dictatorship for nearly thirty years, between 1966 and 1994, many individuals in Malawi, including many writers,³ were systematically silenced. Deprived of their voice, they ultimately faced risk of exile for any artistic material they produced. Although creativity persevered, in the case of the poets presented in this book, it is through a ‘poetics of disorder’⁴ that ideas about home and exile are demonstrated. The predicament left individuals uprooted from the physical homeland *and* psychologically alienated from it while remaining firmly in place in Malawi. The named poets are great examples of this as all express experiences of home as transformed and thought of through the lens of exile’s physical and psychological distance. While not a comparative study, I contend that a major difference between, say, Felix Mnthali and Steve Chimombo, for example, is that the first is a physical exile while the latter is psychologically exiled. The unique perceptions of home from the poets’ experiences of exile emphasise what I call the ‘involuntary physical-*external*’ attitude, of say Mnthali or Frank

³Including the poets I contend with.

⁴By ‘poetics of disorder’ I mean to connote similar views to that of studies produced on Dambudzo Marechera’s writing. See Chennels and Veit-Wild (1999), for example. Owing to his reputation as a “wild” writer (Brutus, in Chennels and Veit-Wild 1999: i), Marechera destabilised Zimbabwe’s nationalist “desire for order” (Shaw, in Chennels and Veit 1999: 10) through a kind of narrative of disorder. He manipulated a wide range of imagery depicting the unfamiliar and, sometimes shocking, fragmentations of identity in his country. For example: “gut-rot and soul sickness” (Marechera 2009: 18). Besides content, Marechera similarly illustrates disorder, or displacement, in the stylistic form of his writing. Like Chimombo’s poems for example, or indeed the other four poets in this book, much of the Zimbabwean’s work is fragmented; sentences are staccato, and punctuation fraught further elevating the notion of disorder.

Chipasula; the ‘voluntary physical-external’, regarding Lupenga Mphande; in contrast to the ‘involuntary physical-internal’ experience of Jack Mapanje; and again to the ‘psychological-internal’ or existential approach ⁵ of Chimombo. However, that is not to say that the poets merely inhabit one of the above dimensions of exile. In their separate experiences of the exilic condition, and as shown in their poetry, they may cross between the dimensions or, indeed, inhabit more than one at a time, as arguably might be said of Mapanje: a ‘psychological-internal’ exile in one instance, ‘involuntary physical-internal’ in the next,⁶ and a ‘voluntary physical-external’ exile during later years in England.

Discussion

Fundamentally, this book grapples with the question: how does the experience of exile affect transformations of ‘home’ as expressed through Malawian poetry? It is, then, about how home is regarded, and presented, in poetry intended through a specific literary landscape in Malawi. Along with home, at the centre of the discussion is the notion of exile. As a whole, this book aims to express a condition of being in or out of Africa. Taking Malawi as my focus lends to an analysis of poetry by subjects who have been uprooted, either physically and/ or psychologically, by years of oppression under a dictator. Thus, the poetry offers insight from perspectives in and out of the physical home. Further questions considered

⁵It goes without saying that *all* of these poets (indeed all exiled individuals) harbour some manifestation of the psychological dimension of exile. But, what is particular regarding individuals like Chimombo is that he remains internal in the country he is from: at-home.

⁶During his time in prison.

Chipasula; the ‘voluntary physical-external’, regarding Lupenga Mphande; in contrast to the ‘involuntary physical-internal’ experience of Jack Mapanje; and again to the ‘psychological-internal’ or existential approach ⁵ of Chimombo. However, that is not to say that the poets merely inhabit one of the above dimensions of exile. In their separate experiences of the exilic condition, and as shown in their poetry, they may cross between the dimensions or, indeed, inhabit more than one at a time, as arguably might be said of Mapanje: a ‘psychological-internal’ exile in one instance, ‘involuntary physical-internal’ in the next,⁶ and a ‘voluntary physical-external’ exile during later years in England.

Discussion

Fundamentally, this book grapples with the question: how does the experience of exile affect transformations of ‘home’ as expressed through Malawian poetry? It is, then, about how home is regarded, and presented, in poetry intended through a specific literary landscape in Malawi. Along with home, at the centre of the discussion is the notion of exile. As a whole, this book aims to express a condition of being in or out of Africa. Taking Malawi as my focus lends to an analysis of poetry by subjects who have been uprooted, either physically and/ or psychologically, by years of oppression under a dictator. Thus, the poetry offers insight from perspectives in and out of the physical home. Further questions considered

⁵It goes without saying that *all* of these poets (indeed all exiled individuals) harbour some manifestation of the psychological dimension of exile. But, what is particular regarding individuals like Chimombo is that he remains internal in the country he is from: at-home.

⁶During his time in prison.

in this book are: how spaces of home are configured and reflected on in poetic expression, and how they are the touchstones of ‘self’, if at all; how ideas about home and exile are experienced in poetry; and how a poet’s understanding of home might offer understanding of wider collective ideas about home in a Malawian context?

It should be noted that the approach taken is an analysis of expressions (namely the poems) rather than an analysis of a southern African experience. While the book strives to represent ideas about home in a specific location, I do not wish to represent Malawi in an essentialist way, nor do I wish to paint a portrait of the country as it is, or has been, imagined. Rather, my arguments are firmly positioned in readings of the poems and reflect the expressions of home therein. Moreover, I intend to get to grips with the implied nexus of the ‘self’ and home in the poetry. Looking at the significance of such ideas in writing by several Malawian poets, I retrospectively contend with the positionality of writers writing from an experience within Malawi *and* outside of the homeland.

The texture⁷ of Malawi’s poetry is my main interest, but I am also particularly concerned with literary theory. In an attempt to reconsider the approach to enquiries about home and exile, I seek to show what might be gained from literature as an inherently creative phenomenon. Universally, people leave ‘traces’ in texts; as “tissues of words”, texts deposit themselves as objects of study, and thought, which ultimately encapsulate certain kinds of knowledge, life transformations and experiences (Barber 2007: 1). Poetry illuminates for us the effects of exile and the transformations that ‘home’

⁷By which I mean the ‘make-up’, ‘quality’, ‘consistency’, or ‘substance’, of poems written by Malawian poets.

endures. In the case of the poetry in this book, poetics of disorder heighten manifestations of home from experiences of exile. At the same time as concentrating on Malawi in particular, I also want to reconfigure the way in which we think of literature in general. To see it not just in terms of art, but to also credit the relevance of literature in expressing dimensions of home. Literary art “has truth”, but it is also “a constant effort to provide a second handle on existence” (Achebe 1989: 95). In this book, literature should be seen as both art for art’s sake *and* as a tool of exposure. After all, “the real voyage of discovery consists not of seeing new sights, but looking with new eyes” (Proust, in Lyer: 2013). Often, ‘new eyes’ are behind literary works, disclosing ideas about home to the world.

Chapter Overview

This book explores the representation of home in poems by five main poets from Malawi – Felix Mnthali, Frank Chipasula, Jack Mapanje, Lupenga Mphande and Steve Chimombo – with a view towards expressing each subject’s experience of exile and the mutations of home therein. No overall, succinct interpretation of ‘home’ is predicted on this journey. But what each poet brings to the discussion is fresh perspective, importantly highlighting different aspects of home.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II provides insight into the methodology of the book while offering more on my own position and specifics on the thrust and focus of the book, as well as integrative literary theory. I am fascinated by ‘literary theory’, especially within the context of Africa; especially regards Appiah’s questioning how there can ever be

endures. In the case of the poetry in this book, poetics of disorder heighten manifestations of home from experiences of exile. At the same time as concentrating on Malawi in particular, I also want to reconfigure the way in which we think of literature in general. To see it not just in terms of art, but to also credit the relevance of literature in expressing dimensions of home. Literary art “has truth”, but it is also “a constant effort to provide a second handle on existence” (Achebe 1989: 95). In this book, literature should be seen as both art for art’s sake *and* as a tool of exposure. After all, “the real voyage of discovery consists not of seeing new sights, but looking with new eyes” (Proust, in Lyer: 2013). Often, ‘new eyes’ are behind literary works, disclosing ideas about home to the world.

Chapter Overview

This book explores the representation of home in poems by five main poets from Malawi – Felix Mnthali, Frank Chipasula, Jack Mapanje, Lupenga Mphande and Steve Chimombo – with a view towards expressing each subject’s experience of exile and the mutations of home therein. No overall, succinct interpretation of ‘home’ is predicted on this journey. But what each poet brings to the discussion is fresh perspective, importantly highlighting different aspects of home.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II provides insight into the methodology of the book while offering more on my own position and specifics on the thrust and focus of the book, as well as integrative literary theory. I am fascinated by ‘literary theory’, especially within the context of Africa; especially regards Appiah’s questioning how there can ever be

a theory of literature, why there ever might be a theory at all, when addressing and assessing texts that reveal all there is to know about that literature (1992: 63). But, despite this fascination, I do not delve too far into such discourse, but rather remain particular to poetry, and methods of interpretation thereof.

Chapter III begins by considering ideas about home and exile in a conceptual framework drawn from a variety of current epistemologies, before theorising on the idea of the subject, in *The Theory of the Subject*. In this section, I look to probe the notion of ‘self’: the Poet as an intended individual voice and as a spokesperson for Malawi.

In Chapter IV, I present a somewhat concise historical backdrop of Malawi, both in terms of its constitution politically and its literary landscape. This, then, acts as foundation upon which a discussion about the poets is grounded. The Poets’ section provides biographical maps showing how each individual might inform of ideas about home and exile.

Finally, Chapter V explores a selection of chosen poems in view of the conceptual framework and the central problem outlined in the book. While each poem will be provided in full as an Appendix, I will include example extracts in the body of this chapter. Chapter V investigates what each poet is saying about home in his poetry, and how it may have changed, transformed, or impregnated itself with further meaning through the experience⁸ of exile. An analysis of themes discerned through the readings will offer an ending, and while my own thoughts are pursued throughout, I hope to conclude with a characterisation of how poetry might extend ideas about home and exile in a Malawian context.

⁸Whether imposed physically or otherwise.

Chapter 2

Methodology: Methods and Multiple Spaces of Study

My Research

While being necessarily concerned with poetry emanating from Malawi, and the dimensions of home explored within that writing, one could say that this book is also an attempt to understand that such poetry is far from unique in speaking of home. As a subject, home resonates universally in literary texts. However, because of “some aesthetic strength”, poetry in Africa at large is “currently enjoying an unprecedented creative outburst in popularity” (Ojaide, in Adu-Gyamfi 2002: 104), carrying in it some African cultural sensibility and, perhaps at the crux of it, a sense of what it is to experience Africa as home. In order to allude to such calculation of Malawian poetry, and to assess potential trends in the relative handling of ideas about home in literature, I use theory from a range of contexts, drawing on ideas shaped by scholars not only on the African continent but from across the world.

Some knowledge parted with in this book was obtained through in-place interviews during my time spent in Malawi in 2010.⁹ I utilise various materials collected in interviews undertaken last year (2013), both in person in England and

⁹The said interviews were conducted with the poet Steve Chimombo in his home town, Zomba, southern Malawi, in September 2010. For a further period of two weeks, I also frequented the Department of Literature and the library at the University of Malawi: Chancellor College, in Zomba.

through subsequent email and Skype contact to southern Africa.¹⁰ Such conversations reveal that, while primarily a textual study, this book is based on a rationale fashioned through a heightened awareness of what and where Malawi is, and how people – poets in particular – live there. In my writing, I have striven to communicate and include something of my own experience in and of Malawi; I hope to contribute to an awareness of the importance of the body of literature found in the country, and to the on-going studies of such texts.

However, with the poems as my raw data, poetry is the main gateway to this book. Some of the poems I have chosen have been investigated before now,¹¹ but not many. This is not unique to the poetry of the country. In relation to literature in general in Malawi, there are detailed studies on oral compositions, but not in abundance (Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985; Chimombo 1988). More papers have been produced on Malawian written literature. However, while suggestive of more wealth,¹² the written text¹³ is tied to socio-political analysis. As has been highlighted: if “a great deal of literature covering the thirty years of ex-President Banda’s

¹⁰Here, I am referring to email contact and a subsequent meeting with Professor Harri Englund, at the University of Cambridge, and to meeting and speaking with Professor Francis Nyamnjoh at The University of Cambridge after his lecture at the Smuts Commonwealth Conference on the 25th of May 2013. Email conversations continued with Professor Nyamnjoh: from Mauritius in June, Cape Town July-September 2013, and from Sao Paulo in September. I also conducted an interview on Skype on the 29th of July 2013 with Professor Nyamnjoh.

¹¹See for example Mthatiwa (2009); Magalasi (2000); and Nazombe (1983).

¹²Including: Nazombe (1983); Mphande (1996); Moto (1999); Magalasi (2000); Mthatiwa (2009) (2011).

¹³The poem included.

autocratic rule in Malawi is now hitting the bookshops ...this literature generally focuses on the history, politics and economics of the period...very little... deals with the *effect* ...on the art and artists” (my emphasis, Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: vii). In turn, a seemingly indelible situation is engendered whereby the literary text and the artist are politically bound.

Individually, the named poets provide expression of a way of life, and interruptions therein, securely tied to the discussion on ideas about home and illustrating something of a ‘Malawian experience’.¹⁴ While the Politics of the country are part and parcel of any individual living in a community, influencing decisions and movements within the way of life, an intention of this book is to assess a rather more cultural aesthetic. The very fact that oral compositions are used by Malawian poets in their poetry¹⁵ helps to raise the notion that literary texts are windows through which we might glimpse the makeup of particular cultural experience, collective histories and individually cultivated ideas about home. The political dimension cannot, and should not, be taken out of poetry from Malawi. As Landeg White, an important scholar in studies on Malawi says:

It's not that these were 'political poets' in the sense that they had an agenda. [It was] a situation in which everything was political, except the politics. Which church you went to, was political. How long your hair was, was political. Which region you came from, was political. How women dressed, was political. Not attending a political rally, when one was in your area, was political. Not getting out of your car

¹⁴Albeit an essentialised term.

¹⁵ As could be said of much more literature from the African continent.

to applaud when Dr Banda's motorcade was passing, was political. My late brother-in-law Frank was detained for 18 months in 1976. His crime? He lived next door to Kirby Mwambetania, detained for being a northerner. So when Kirby was taken, Frank went to bath and feed his four young children until Kirby's wife could return from Nairobi where she was on a course. That, too, was political!

(White: 17th March 2013).

Politics are too interwoven and locked within the confines and structure of society, and this was especially true during the era of Dr. Banda. But, concerning the relationship between the literary work -the poem- and the cultural act, there may be more to analyse regarding the Poet's endeavour, intentions aside from their political bravery. While, in some respects, Chinua Achebe is right to refuse "to separate politics and art" in the context of African literature as a whole, it cannot be refuted that his writing unfolds in a manner which distinguishes him as an African, a Nigerian, even perhaps an Igbo artist (Chapman 2003: 5). The political is integral, but the aesthetic of a homeland inherently lies within. Chapman relays that in Achebe's work, "paradoxically, tradition lives" (Chapman 2003: 6). So, while I do not mean to negate the assertion that politics and art are inseparable, in this book I wish to emphasise that we need not ignore "the inextricable connection between political imperative and the imaginative drive" to distinguish that there is relationship outside of this too (Chapman 2003: 5).

Despite the fact that different groups of people have written about Malawi and the notorious dictator, Dr. Banda,

in a myriad of ways and with various agendas,¹⁶ few scholars have dedicated extensive attention to the ways in which the literature, and particularly poetry, might consider experiences of the country. Those who have come near to it again tend to focus more on reconstructing a historical portrait of the political realities in Malawi, considering more the circumstances of the dictatorship (Mphande 1996; Jones and Manda 2006). This book is not another attempt to examine Malawi as it was between 1966 and 1994 when Hastings Banda was in power. Rather it is a study of a sample of literature taken from the country in this era, and how experience of home may be transformed by exile and how it is retrospectively constituted in the imagery of the poems.

Briefly taking in hand the issue of the period managed, the question might be raised as to why one should assess events of a historical nature. What does it matter? It matters because of what can be retrieved from it. Particularly with regards to questions about home. It may reveal relations beyond the individual; it may address what kind of art can and does flourish during certain styles of governance. While these kinds of factors may well be largely speculative, and certainly not all addressed in this book, they do open doors and thereby imply the need for further engagement in such a study. Observing time historically lends the opportunity of seeing in perspective.¹⁷ Such perspective is in turn a vantage point from which to assess, reveal and question meaning.

¹⁶Certainly in comparison to other southern African countries, such as Zimbabwe, documentation on Malawi is scarce. Yet some scholars have produced papers on the country's historical backdrop, political situation and the memory of the Banda years. For instance: Mphande (1996); Jones and Manda (2006).

¹⁷And, that is in any country, or indeed across any given space, from any position and in any given field of study.

Overall, I aim to execute the task in this book through the study of poems. I seek to illustrate that a ‘home-self’ nexus emerges in poetry, and attempt to provide an analysis of how that nexus is inherently linked to experiences of exile in a Malawian context.

Limitations and delimitations

In this book, I intend to contribute to the study of poetry as a means of processing conceptions of home. It is in spite of an abundance of lived situations of forced migration and studies thereof¹⁸ that contemporary researchers tend to neglect ideas about home as visible and particularly active in African literary work.

While I do not want it to diminish the relevance of potential conclusions in the context of Malawi, I am also aware that ‘home’ is a paramount part of the human condition, and that it is therefore evoked in literature across the world. In this respect, the book merely adds to a wider corpus of academic work already existing on the subject.¹⁹ But, at the same time, this subject has not yet been emphasised in studies concerning Malawi, and it is, therefore, important to contend with.

¹⁸The movement of people in Africa, both within, across and out of the continent, has been studied with various objectives in mind. Gozdziaik and Shandy (2002) look into effects on peoples’ religion. Howard (2010) has focused on analysing an historical perspective; through a lens of conflicts. Displacement has also been taken up by Lindley (2010), and Malkki (1995), for example. While political, economic and social practices have further been explored by Hammar and Rogers (2008), Roque (2008), and Jones (2010).

¹⁹From Said (2001) to Nkosi (1983); Achebe (2000), or Hidalgo (1994) to Frederiksen and Nyberg Sørensen (2002), home and exile have long been subjects of study across the world.

Overall, I aim to execute the task in this book through the study of poems. I seek to illustrate that a ‘home-self’ nexus emerges in poetry, and attempt to provide an analysis of how that nexus is inherently linked to experiences of exile in a Malawian context.

Limitations and delimitations

In this book, I intend to contribute to the study of poetry as a means of processing conceptions of home. It is in spite of an abundance of lived situations of forced migration and studies thereof¹⁸ that contemporary researchers tend to neglect ideas about home as visible and particularly active in African literary work.

While I do not want it to diminish the relevance of potential conclusions in the context of Malawi, I am also aware that ‘home’ is a paramount part of the human condition, and that it is therefore evoked in literature across the world. In this respect, the book merely adds to a wider corpus of academic work already existing on the subject.¹⁹ But, at the same time, this subject has not yet been emphasised in studies concerning Malawi, and it is, therefore, important to contend with.

¹⁸The movement of people in Africa, both within, across and out of the continent, has been studied with various objectives in mind. Gozdziaik and Shandy (2002) look into effects on peoples’ religion. Howard (2010) has focused on analysing an historical perspective; through a lens of conflicts. Displacement has also been taken up by Lindley (2010), and Malkki (1995), for example. While political, economic and social practices have further been explored by Hammar and Rogers (2008), Roque (2008), and Jones (2010).

¹⁹From Said (2001) to Nkosi (1983); Achebe (2000), or Hidalgo (1994) to Frederiksen and Nyberg Sørensen (2002), home and exile have long been subjects of study across the world.

As my main concern, I attempt to distinguish poetry as no different from any other text analysed in such research. By this I mean to say that *any* text, from any discipline, is subject to interpretation; and although the book is largely interpretative so too is a book that employs policy data, historicity or even first-hand field research notes. What is important is to be aware of and reflect upon the potential for bias and construed readings.

However, poetry has a special character. This is not to be denied. While it is difficult to offer a succinct definition of the term, ‘poetry’ is usually “characterised by elevated language and syntactical variation from everyday language and writing” (Strachan and Terry 2000: 10). To compare poetry to prose, while just as elaborative, it may be thought of as less descriptive.²⁰ All language has rhythm but poetry, “a specialised form of language”, is based on consistent structures of ‘patterning’ which are “often characterised by sound” (Strachan and Terry 2000: 10).²¹ It follows that such language requires specific interpretative methods in analysis. There are various methods²² considered in wider discourses of poetry, but I will maintain focus on particular aspects in order to narrow my analysis. Perhaps of most importance is the content of the poetry I look at – what the poem says; the poet’s register; what substance it holds. Meanwhile, the style

²⁰See Strachan and Terry’s citation of S. T. Coleridge’s work: his prose compared to his poetry (Strachan and Terry 2000: 10).

²¹It is of no surprise that oral literatures were followed by written poetry in this sense.

²²For instance, analysis of form; style; content; genre of poetry.

of language is a preoccupation;²³ and so, too, is interpretation of form.²⁴

As stated earlier, written and oral literatures are in abundance in Malawi. Despite radio and sound waves presently becoming an area of interest,²⁵ thus enabling the digestibility of oral texts from a location outside of the country, upon starting this book I made the decision to first and foremost concentrate on Malawi's written poetry in English. To be clear, my analysis is of Malawian poetry written *by Malawians*, despite the 'Malawian literature' that may exist by expatriates, or as travel logs by Europeans. While there are great novels from Malawi in English,²⁶ this book, too, does not part with in-depth contribution to ideas about home in any other strand of written literature aside from poetry. This is in order to look clearly at the field of poetry, a corpus which, in Malawi's case, is far more plentiful. It has been implied that this is similar across much of the African continent: "poetry has always been a major component of African imaginative activity" (Nwoga 1979: 32). This may be so as oral literatures lend themselves more to writing of a poetic fashion, lyrical and rhythmic, than to texts of narrative style: prose. Myth, digested orally, also comprises the makeup of much Malawian poetic text. Oral literature is indelibly joined to written poetry in Malawi;

²³Whether it is figurative or literal for instance, and how it is emotive.

²⁴That is, the structure and tense employed, and if any repetition occurs, for example.

²⁵See Englund (2011).

²⁶Such as Chimombo's *The Wrath of Napolo* (2000), in which home is effectively fashioned through folklore and Malawian myth (for examples see page 95). It is interesting, too, that the author integrates notions of home as the place one returns to upon death (see pages 129-131 and page 220).

therefore, while not my focus, oral literature cannot, and will not, be shied away from in my assessment of the various poems. Myth and spoken word are important elements of the poetry analysed, Mapanje (1981; 1988) employs Malawian folklore, and oral compositions of creation myths for instance. It was as part of the Writers' Workshop, along with poets such as Felix Mnthali, Steve Chimombo and Frank Chipasula, "that he began exploring the rich oral traditions that are so characteristic of his work" (Lea 2007). While similar to others from across the continent, including Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, Mapanje says that "one of the things that made us [Malawian poets] slightly more original was that we studied African oral literature more seriously" (in Lea 2007). This oral tradition characterises what Mapanje calls an "African" mode of communication, based on the telling and re-telling of stories (in Lea 2007). As a whole, Africa has been described as the "continent of the voice" because of the thriving strength and variety of poetic expression (Barber 2007: 30).²⁷ The Poet has long been fashioned as the "voice of the common people" (Barber 2007: 52). Certainly, Malawi's heritage is rich with poetry, song and dance. Songs and poems will almost always accompany ceremonial functions, with or without dance, as they are viewed as being highly expressive modes of communicating feeling and opinion (Chirambo 2007: 205).

In terms of delimiting the book, I have kept as closely as I can to the work of the five named Malawian poets in order not to deviate too far from a given literary corpus, time and

²⁷Take the orally transmitted *izibongo* ('poetry') of the Xhosa people in southern Africa, or the importance of the *oriki* ('praise poetry') among the Yoruba communities in Nigeria as examples here of the prolonged upholding of poetry.

space. The focus on poetry from the Banda years in Malawi is underpinned by the need to examine the poetic representation of transformations of 'home' from the experience of exile. More specifically, the undertaking of the book is informed by the need to explore expressions of home within a given timeframe. Notions of exile were undoubtedly prominent under President Banda. And while the poets were artistically engaged throughout the Presidency, the poetry I cite is in keeping with publications within the 1980's. Further, regarding the poems singly and as a collection demonstrates how they constitute veritable readings of the 'self', as Malawian individuals, as well as one of a collective. The decision to study the poets individually was motivated by their unique sense of creative reaction to the phenomenon of exile in Africa. Certainly, the poetics here are not all the same because each poet's creation, in their reflections on home, is not defined by any absolute archetype. But I do not wish this to become a comparative study as such, mostly because this is where the prospect of this book being an attractive one lies: even in the diversity of approaches of these poets, the unity of managing 'home' cannot be denied. Meanwhile, it is important that home and exile are not biographically static; rather biography informs and works in relation to comprehending both.

In the casting of these five poets, I am aware that the focus is solely on male perspectives and interpretations of Malawi as home. Any such female counterpart is notoriously difficult to find.²⁸ While speaking of an all-encompassing

²⁸This is not to say that female poets do not exist in Malawi, nor that I have not located such writers. An example of a Malawian female in print is Stella Chipasula. Chipasula was educated in Lilongwe Girls' Secondary School and went on to Teachers' College in Mulanje before resuming her

Malawi then, a significant group is not considered. That also goes for the youth of the country. This, however, characterizes my approach further.²⁹

education in the USA. As well as studies on Malawian folktales, her work includes poems; as seen in *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry* (1995). In one, titled "Your Name is Gift", Chipasula would lend plenty to my discussion in this book as she refers to a personal vision of 'home'. With her background, displaced from the homeland in pursuit of education, and the focus on 'self' too, her work is important to briefly cite here.

Also, 'VoiceFlame' is an online group which "seeks to empower efforts in making women's voices heard in the country" "through writing their own stories" See: <http://www.voanews.com/content/malawian-women-share-life-stories/1699922.html>

²⁹Worthy of note, women and younger generations alike are creating literary texts in Malawi. "The general movement is towards anthologizing" (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 34). Interestingly, this means writers, "publishing single stories, single poems", are widely acknowledged and read in pieces such as newspaper publications (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 34.). This, of course, effects dissemination and access to Malawian text as newspapers are largely ephemeral.

Up and coming poets, such as Pat Pakla and Austin Tenthani Phiri, produce work for websites like: <http://www.poetrysoup.com/poets/Malawian> ; the 16th Poetry Africa International Poetry Festival, held in Durban, South Africa, in October 2012 was testimony to this: <http://www.cca.ukzn.ac.za/index.php/news/704-16th-poetry-africa-2012-general-press-release.html>. And, so too, is 'Malawi's Cultural Festival Poetry Reading at the Crossroads', which can be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--td1gTtALk> New poems are deposited frequently by Malawian artists such as John Paul Kayuni on blogs like <http://youthfulmalawianwriters.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/silent-cry-by-john-paul-kayuni.html>

Meanwhile, there seems to be movement in the field of "performed poetry" among younger writers; for instance: poets such as Felix Njonjonjo (who studied at Chancellor College in Zomba) are performing poetry on a monthly basis, and in the vernacular. Shadreck Chikoti has, in the last couple of years, founded The Story Club in Lilongwe, too. This

‘club’ is the stage for many artists to display their works – oral and written.

Perhaps it is that daily and performed “poetry to the people” is more the norm in Malawi (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 34-5).

Chapter 3

Home, Exile and the Self: The Negotiation of Concepts

Ideas about Home

...to be born in a place, to stay and live there, to know that you are of it, more or less forever...

(Said 2001: 143)

As the Palestinian exile Edward Said suggests, home is a place where we experience some fundamental notion of belonging; a sense of rootedness. The African-American writer, Toni Morrison meanwhile adds:

Home: a familiar place... kept changing behind your back...

(Morrison 2003: 86)

What is certain from the onset is that ‘home’ is “shot through with ambiguity” (Jackson 1995: 3). It might be thought of as one’s physical birth place, a past, or as an imagined place, a future. Or it might be the interstices between places³⁰ in a present time; or, indeed, an unrestricted place of thinking and creativity. As Morrison relays, while it is something familiar to us, home is unpredictable and strange in the very next instance. Francis Nyamnjoh says that conceptualising home is about “us being curious about what

³⁰In the current state of affairs, in a modern world, transnationalism means that we are more naturally accustomed to seeing home as being between places.

is apparently familiar as much as it is about the strange” (Nyamnjoh: 25th May 2013). In relation to both sides of the dichotomy it occupies- discourse versus reality³¹- home is a permanent work in progress; always subject to renegotiation, it is best understood as situational and relational (Nyamnjoh 2012: 68). We are ‘intimate strangers’³² with the idea (discourse) *and* the experience (reality) of home. It is an “imagined location that can no longer be more readily fixed in a mental landscape, than in actual geography” (George, in Jones 2011: 43). It is not one thing, it is many. An example of the changing nature of home can be taken from Steve Chimombo’s *The Wrath of Napoléon* (2000). In this novel the author regards home in one sense as a house – a domestic space defining only the characters’ placement. But, in the next instance, threatened by intruding burglars, the house signifies four protective walls; it becomes more than mere physical representation, the structure then symbolically relates to the oppressive socio-political predicament of the certain contextual environment of the novel. What is clarified here is that physical *and* symbolic fields of home coexist.

Different groups of scholars from a variety of academic disciplines³³ have shaped ideas and produced work on home throughout history.³⁴ Moreover, writing on home and the interconnected ideas about place, space and time is a densely populated terrain of scholarship (Bender and Winer 2001: 4). Time and space are “ineluctably connected”, says Hall;

³¹As referred to by Jones (2011).

³²A term coined by Nyamnjoh (2012).

³³Ethnography, philosophy, literary and cultural studies among them.

³⁴To name a few: studies on home include scholarly works by Said (2001), Bhabha (1990; 1994), and Douglas (1991); while more specifically on place and space: Rose (1996), Massey (2005), Gieryn (2000), Bender (1993), and Feld and Basso (1996); areas of geography: Soja (1989).

“together, time and space constitute landscape” (in Nuttall and Coetzee 1998: 193). Chinua Achebe’s fascinating depiction of returning home in the back of a truck adds dimension to the subject of home. Achebe’s recollection of the childhood time he entered his supposed hometown, his “ancestral home” (Achebe 2000: 1), evokes the notion that memory is inherently tied to both time and space, and, therefore, to home (Lefebvre 1991). Taken to a familial place in Nigeria, Achebe could not comprehend it as home. He had not known of it, its locality, its ways. Yet, based on the sentiment of kin relations, ancestral importance, and memories imbued in the place,³⁵ home was a conundrum to be learned and an unproblematic given. Furthermore, this case shows that personal experience has huge bearing upon understandings of home. The individual³⁶ is central: believing, creating and living ‘home’ in ways which are imagined differently depending on who you are.

Starting with the physical place of home, Ndebele says returning home but finding no home forces the question ‘what is home?’ (in Oliphant 1998: 455). Such a paradox highlights the idea that “surely it is not merely a house” (in Oliphant 1998: 455). While Douglas (1991) says that “home is located in space”, and that relatively speaking ‘home’ is a “localizable idea” revolving around the question ‘where?’ rather than the ‘who?’ or ‘how?’ (1991: 289), home is not necessarily “locateable”; nor need it be “anything built at all” (Schroder 2006: 34). After all, “houses are impermanent” (Jackson 1995: 6). What such an idea illuminates is that home is not static; multidimensional and multifaceted, it must be

³⁵Be that a direct memory he kept or a distinguished memory of the ancestor.

³⁶As explored more thoroughly in the discussion on ‘self’.

‘evolutionary’ (Lefebvre 1991). It changes. Thus, we are unrestricted by specific homelands and instead simultaneously connected to one place and many.

But, it remains that home is construed as some distinct place in the world that people establish for themselves, and that, in part, a sense of home is made from “repetitive details of daily interaction” and use of physical space (Feldman 2006: 12). Geographic place is important to the idea of home: Ingmar Bergman says “it could be said that I found my landscape, my real home” (in Jackson 1995: 50). Being in-place often implies being at-home. Thus, belonging to place is integral to home: belonging and locality are shaped and defined by “actual territorial emplacement” (Lovell 1998: 2). Certainly, recent anthropological research focuses on landscape, and its crucial involvement in humans’ establishment of emplacement (Bender, in Lovell 1998: 6). While the debate of ‘space’ versus ‘place’ is not my concern, a few ideas are worth mentioning. It is interesting that Gieryn suggests that the two terms ‘space’ and ‘landscape’ connote different things. He says in thinking of ‘space’ one imagines a wide, perhaps empty, void of land, while ‘landscape’ conjures up a geography filled up with people, actions, objects and representations (Gieryn 2000: 465). Casey, meanwhile, thinks of landscape as both ‘absolute’ and ‘empty’ (Casey 1976). In *The Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre also looked into distinctions of spatialities. Looking mainly at the representation of space in comparison to the spaces of representation, Lefebvre theorised of ‘conceived versus lived’ (Lefebvre 1991).

The terms ‘place’, ‘space’ and ‘landscape’ might conjure different notions of geographic area, but it is interesting to ask what makes “impersonal geography” a home (Casey, in

Feld and Basso 1996: 14). Home is certainly not wholly conceived in geographic terms:

Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other. There is no place like home.
(Tuan 1977).

The suggestion is that place is “geographic location”, “material form”, and invested with “value and meaning” (Gieryn 2000: 464-465). Bender (1993) says that landscapes are etched onto bodies through a mutual placing of humans in nature and nature in human populations. Englund adds that in everyday experiences, important factors of social life are “reproduced and transformed... by using the human body as a medium of expression” (Englund 1998: 1166).³⁷ I imagine that landscape, and therefore home, is a creation, and re-creation, of human experience, then. It is what Bender says it is: “engagement with the world” (Bender 1993:1). *We*, people, are at the centre of what home is. As we perceive and bear ‘impressions’ on matters of place (Casey 1976), so “senses make place” and ‘home’ is created (Feld, in Feld and Basso 1996: 19).

Conventional thinking may have located landscape as a domain for geographers, but, as a signifying system, ‘home’ is capable of conveying multiple and often contrasting fields of shared and remembered meanings (Cosgrove, in Bender 1993: 281). Aside from the physical, home is placed in conversation with the symbolic: “home is the realization of ideas” (Douglas 1991: 290). Whatever the specific idea realised, imagined and crystallised by people in a given

³⁷Further, see work by Turner: *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (1984).

context, in a given landscape, assembles the meaning and value of what it is to be in or at 'home' (Douglas 1991: 290).³⁸ Of course, the process by which people imagine varies. Therefore ideas about home must be contextualised since "they provide frames for the production of social life worlds" (Appadurai, in Probst 2002: 181). It must be conceived everywhere that places are perceived and engaged with differently. Appadurai argues that while a particular landscape can 'generate' and shape people and their actions, it may also be that place is shaped *by* people and their relation to "other spatially organised structures that 'drive' the localities as part of that particular context" (Appadurai, in Probst 2002: 181).³⁹

While there seems "to be an urge to be at home everywhere" (Jackson 1995: 4), home naturally has structure to it, and that structure is tied to temporality. Douglas argues that while a hotel might be considered as a type of home, it is in fact a "non-home" because its domesticity displays "no sign of coming out of a state of confusion" (Douglas 1991: 28.). A home, then, has to have some sort of a structure in time, it cannot be considered merely as a space (Douglas 1991: 28); as Casey indicates, "generality... belongs to space" while "particularity... belongs to place" (Casey, in Feld and Basso 1996: 15). The pinnacle of experiencing home in this world rests on particular times and particular places in time (Casey 1976). Depicting a house and its "regularities", Douglas then says that "having shelter is not having a home, nor is having a house..." (1991: 289). Rather, temporal

³⁸This could well manifest in knowledge of natural phenomenon, or animal reverence for instance.

³⁹For examples, see Bender (1993); Turner (1967): regarding the temporal and spatial grid layouts among the aLuund of south-western Congo.

structure is home. As people live in the structure of time so home is necessarily bound with “aesthetic and moral dimensions” (Douglas 1991: 289).

Even in its tie to temporality, home still cannot be “one definitive sort of thing”. In sum: “places not only *are* they *happen*” (Casey, in Feld and Basso 1996: 27). In *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), V.S. Naipaul shows that place is dynamic: understood as geography, awareness of space, and depicted by time.⁴⁰ No definition of home is offered by the author. The locality becomes something familiar, yet the experience of the home place is different each time it is encountered. The dynamism of home is also played with by Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved* (1987). In this text ideas about home are woven round the haunts of 124, elevating the role of memory. This writer specifically considers the ‘unknown’ home in the sense that it is not consciously ‘re-membered’ as such but remains home due to its relation to the past.⁴¹ Elaborating on the tale Achebe tells of how he returned to his

⁴⁰*The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) has been used before now in discourses on ‘home’ and landscapes. See Bender (1993).

⁴¹Morrison specifically writes with the African-American Diaspora in mind: the slave trade and every misery afflicted integral to it. Other works of hers, including her latest publication *Home* (2012), and *Love* (2003) (from which the earlier quotation in this book was taken), are also preoccupied by temporal understandings of being at ‘home’, either in physicality or in memory.

While she closely concentrates on the African presence in American literature with regards the term she coined ‘re-memory’, Toni Morrison’s writing is particularly useful in relation to this idea of memory and the manner in which humans re-construct it:

“I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my memory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do” (Morrison 1987: 35-36).

See: *Beloved* (1987) and *Playing in the Dark* (1992).

ancestral home is interesting here. In the back of the truck, staring on to the moving road below, Achebe sat looking away from home. This seems a contradiction: conjuring someone seemingly disengaged with home. Would he not be facing towards the direction of home? Surely fascinated, animated to arrive somewhere new, excited and eager to see and be immersed in such experience? But, perhaps that is just it: 'home' or not, this place was new for the boy. While it may have been the home of his ancestors- thus filled with told significance, and his-stories of him-self- Achebe says it was a "rocky start in my hometown". It was, after all, the unknown. While he "later became rather fond of it, even a little sentimental... it began slowly, took its time to grow and develop" and to become "transformed into a lifelong quest" (Achebe 2000: 8-9). Along with Morrison's (1987) ideas of the unknown and 're-memory', what Achebe portrays is that home should be understood as both natural to us *and* created by us.

Home is something which transcends boundaries; Lovell says it is "temporally mobilised and crystallised at particular moments" (Lovell 1998: 6). So, "not for everybody is home located in a certain house", it is being "connected to people, family and friends", and is "associated to specific feelings" (Schroder 2006:34).⁴² Among others, including Olwig and Hastrup (1997), Bhabha (1994) argues that, in relation to culture, home manifests at the "interstices between people, their interaction with one another", and in everyday experiences (1994: 4). Given his travelled centre, Nyamnjoh

⁴² In *Weep Not, Child* (1964), Ngugi illustrates this: "Home was especially a nice place when all the brothers and many village girls and boys came in the evening and, sitting around the fireplace in a big circle, they would gossip, laugh and play" (Ngugi 1964: 25).

says a lot of different things come into play when he thinks of home, but in sum it is:

the attachment to different relationships that are fulfilling... to people, to things and physical environment, relationships to certain memories...

(Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013)

Significantly, what Nyamnjoh does not do is to separate the physical and the mental, symbolic ideas of home. Rather, he says that home is relational and situational in totality. Furthermore, he argues that the idea of home is not a given, and that the physical and/or symbolic relationships need cultivating; a person needs to “domesticate the place” in order for it to become ‘home’ (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). The relationship, like any relationship, can present tensions and must be worked on. Home is no longer just one place, “it is locations”, and a complex set of ever-changing locations at that (Hooks, cited in Jones 2011: 39).⁴³ At the same time as being a lived, physical reality, home “is a metaphorical place of personal attachment and identification” (Hooks, cited in Jones 2011: 43). The “ultimate quest is for an intimate relationship”, which requires a “baptism of sorts” (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). In sum, it is a discourse which brings into reality imagined, symbolic or mental ideas.

⁴³ An illustration of such may be found in the snapshots of Professor Nyamnjoh that this thesis gives. His positionality is various and shifts throughout the course of writing – between places and spaces, on the one hand, I interviewed him in Cambridge, UK, and, on the other, we spoke while he held office in Cape Town, South Africa. Sao Paulo, too, was another residence of his.

Besides home being written about in literature,⁴⁴ literature itself remains the heart of what it is to be home: “where thou art, that is home” (Dickinson 1999: 334). Unfolding an analogy between a hardback book and a person, one and both created by the other, Nyamnjoh says that just as no person is the same, and no book tells the same story, no home is ever told in the same way (Nyamnjoh: 25th May 2013). It is a ‘self’ experience. But, “to constitute the real” every one of us “must occupy the imaginary” (Hemon: 2013).⁴⁵ By doing so, we can write home for our-selves, and, in so doing, create the reality of it. Home and literature thus maintain a relationship like that of a married couple – bound while maintaining their difference.

Ideas about Exile and the Memory of Home

Exile is... fundamentally a discontinuous state of being.
(Said 2001: 140)

Movement is a fantastic privilege...[it is] only by stepping out of one's life that we have a sense of what is important... suddenly you're alert to the secret patterns of the world
(Lyer 2013)

Just like the reality of the predicament, the term ‘exile’ is not easily explained as a definitive or unquestionable one. Rather, it is wrought with paradox and ambiguity. Both theorists and exiles themselves have long produced studies

⁴⁴Such as exemplified above: Naipaul, Morrison and Achebe.

⁴⁵By this, Hemon was referring directly to the form of storytelling and creativity in literary works.

Besides home being written about in literature,⁴⁴ literature itself remains the heart of what it is to be home: “where thou art, that is home” (Dickinson 1999: 334). Unfolding an analogy between a hardback book and a person, one and both created by the other, Nyamnjoh says that just as no person is the same, and no book tells the same story, no home is ever told in the same way (Nyamnjoh: 25th May 2013). It is a ‘self’ experience. But, “to constitute the real” every one of us “must occupy the imaginary” (Hemon: 2013).⁴⁵ By doing so, we can write home for our-selves, and, in so doing, create the reality of it. Home and literature thus maintain a relationship like that of a married couple – bound while maintaining their difference.

Ideas about Exile and the Memory of Home

Exile is... fundamentally a discontinuous state of being.
(Said 2001: 140)

Movement is a fantastic privilege...[it is] only by stepping out of one's life that we have a sense of what is important... suddenly you're alert to the secret patterns of the world
(Lyer 2013)

Just like the reality of the predicament, the term ‘exile’ is not easily explained as a definitive or unquestionable one. Rather, it is wrought with paradox and ambiguity. Both theorists and exiles themselves have long produced studies

⁴⁴Such as exemplified above: Naipaul, Morrison and Achebe.

⁴⁵By this, Hemon was referring directly to the form of storytelling and creativity in literary works.

about the experience of exile.⁴⁶ While “we need not leave London, Paris, or anywhere, to see cultural identities and present realities of mobilities now;⁴⁷ we are one cosmopolitan place” (Nyamnjoh: 25th May 2013), Lahiri suggests that “uprootedness and alienation has been dogging the footsteps of man perhaps since the beginning of history” (Lahiri 2001: 1). In this regard, it is no wonder that a myriad of responses to exile have been formed from a varied set of agendas.⁴⁸

I do not want to deny the importance of studies written on collective exile;⁴⁹ nor negate the assertion that exile is a noteworthy phenomenon in terms of the collective as well as the individual (Bevan 1990: 3). But the scale of exile “is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible” (Said 2001: 138). As it is virtually impossible to reassemble or write detailed accounts based on such widespread experience

⁴⁶Albeit across varying contexts and discourses (literary and cultural studies, refugee studies, anthropology, social science, and politics among them) a few to have studied exile are: Said (2001); Lahiri (2001); Bevan (1990); Lamming (1992); Morrison (1992); Feldman (2006); Bender (2001); Arendt (1973); Malkki (1995; 1996); Maalouf (2000).

⁴⁷While war, economic and environmental changes have all influenced human movement most recently, migration has “acquired unprecedented intensity and dimension in the twentieth century” (Lahiri 2001: 1).

⁴⁸‘Exile’ is integral to discourse on ‘migration’ and ‘displacement’; the “tendency to link or substitute diaspora for exile is no new phenomenon” either (Olaoluwa 2008: 36). The conceptual overlap is “based on a transnational crossing of borders by people” (Arndt, in Bekers, Helff and Merolla 2009: 104). Yet, the displacee is too often overlooked in such studies. Sandra Roque (2008) shows an exception in her presentation of how displacement may be biographically mapped in a specific time and space. Emphasis on the human being is important as it highlights that when speaking of the situation of displacement we are, first and foremost, speaking of people and their experiences of that situation.

⁴⁹Bakewell, Koser and Martin (2011); Liisa Malkki’s work (1995). Edward Said says that “a creation of the twentieth-century state” the term and inference of ‘refugee’ became “a political one” (Said 2001: 144).

without rendering it banal (Said 2001: 138), I maintain that collective exile is not my concern in this book. Rather than mass displacement, I am interested in the individual: the exiled condition.

Importantly, ‘exile’ has “fired poetic imagination” (Lahiri 2001: 1).⁵⁰ To comprehend the ways in which researchers’ and artists’ alike have been inspired by such a concept, it is important to outline its dimensions and various strands. Firstly, associated with connotations of a political nature, there is the dimension of *physical* exile. From the era of Greeks and Romans, ‘exile’ has been deemed “a form of severe punishment for alleged offenses against the State” (Stassen, in Lahiri 2001: 116). For such offences, one can be banished from a country altogether. In the first instance then, it is involuntary; it is the forced removal of a person to that of an *external* location: out of sight and out of place. This, the ‘involuntary physical-*external*’ experience, is perhaps what is most often thought of in relation to the term. But, in addition to the involuntary, there is a voluntary strand of *physical* exile. This is a case of “self-selected or imposed physical severance from an... entity to which one rightfully belongs” (Stassen, in Lahiri 2001: 116). While there is still emphasis on the physical uprooting, the focus here has shifted to that of choice. This has been described by Nazombe as “the exile proper” (in Collier 1992: 294). Implying that this kind of individual is a “rebel” who rejects life as they have known it, “the exile proper” does not fight the system, they simply move away from it (in Collier 1992: 294). Then, while still physical in nature, as it constitutes being similarly forcibly removed from sight, and again involuntary, the difference with the third

⁵⁰While, too, maintaining itself as a manifestation of anthropological and social science discourse about displacement.

instance of exile is that the person is arguably not out of place. The epitome of this is, of course, imprisonment: one becomes an *internal* exile.⁵¹

Besides the *physical*, exile also possesses a *psychological* dimension. Here, I do not mean to highlight psychological *affect*. What is most important to differentiate between physical and psychological dimensions of exile is that the psychological rather relates to those who remain both in-sight *and* in-place. Such psychological exile means the person remains physically internal in a country, but, for whatever reason, they do not feel at-home in one's own home environ; it is ascribed to "a free person ...who has become sociologically alien" (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). Psychological exile is the "creation of a protective, *intellectual space*, fortified by a fence of self-selected or imposed silence, amidst a hostile... environment (inner exile)" (my emphasis: Stassen, in Lahiri 2001: 116). The psychological exile effectively takes 'exile proper' to another level, suggesting that a person rebels voluntarily, simultaneously remaining in-place physically while staying out of place mind-fully.⁵²

To note, the 'psychological-internal' dimension of exile is quite easily observed as a prevalent feature among artists, particularly with regards to literary figures.⁵³ Despite the

⁵¹That is 'involuntary physical-*internal*' exile.

⁵²Anthony Nazombe diagnoses that this kind of self-exile is "akin to the internal émigré of totalitarian states", arguing that such a figure will move about in the home society, "but rejects its purposes and despises its values" (Nazombe, in Collier 1992: 293).

⁵³In situations of political upheaval a country's artists often write as a means of documenting present circumstances of oppression. See Amnesty or PEN as examples of this.

However, innovation occurs in situations of socio- political rest, too. Virginia Woolf might provide just one example of this, psychologically

varying contexts and differing manifestations of the experience, authors have grappled with psychological exile just as much as with the physical dimension in their work, the world over. Such a sentiment can be seen in writings by Eastern European intellectuals during the Cold War. Milan Kundera is one individual linked to the term ‘internal exile’.⁵⁴ Witold Gombrowicz is another example.⁵⁵ Remaining in his homeland, Poland, Gombrowicz⁵⁶ fended for inner freedom from an experience of internal exile amidst distorted ideologies in his country. Corresponding to Bakhtin’s notion of ‘outsidedness’,⁵⁷ African literatures are of no exception in documenting experiences from the internal periphery. The psychological dimension manifests as a kind of dual or ‘double-consciousness’ in writings from the margins.⁵⁸ Emanating from his own experience as an exile, Dambudzo Marechera⁵⁹ powerfully portrays psychological exile in his work,⁶⁰ violently displaying an alienation of the mind.⁶¹

estranged from society as a whole during her life in England. Such estrangement manifests powerfully in her work.

⁵⁴For instance, see *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984).

⁵⁵See work on Gombrowicz in Gutthy (2009).

⁵⁶Like Kundera in Czechoslovakia.

⁵⁷The Russian philosopher coined this term with regards the state of being positioned on the fringes; on the outside of something – namely a social circle. For more, see Gutthy (2009).

⁵⁸Despite its original relationship to the politics of race in a specific African-American context, the term ‘double-consciousness’, coined by DuBois in the 19th century, is useful to regard in relation to exile more generally.

⁵⁹A Zimbabwean writer and critic.

⁶⁰ While he experienced internal and external; physical and psychological exile, Marechera is termed a Zimbabwean “dissident writer” (Shaw, in Chennels and Veit-Wild 1999: 16).

⁶¹See *The House of Hunger* (1978). There are many more examples. The Ghanaian novelist, Ayi Kwei Armah is worthy of note as the internal-

What is most plain to see from the above is that, despite the tendency to essentialise due to the logic of binaries, in exile “one size does not fit all” (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). Effectively, “‘exile’ carries with it... a touch of solitude and spirituality” (Said 2001: 144). Exile is an individual kind of an experience, where the human body is, again, conceived of as a type of home: we are the house in which the idea of home resides. With all its terror, and as a predicament which once experienced and endured “is not easily reversed” (Feldman 2006: 11), exiles are rendered as something different: “exile... is difference, otherness” (Bevan 1990: 3). As such, exiles become beings ‘neither here nor there’: they occupy a phase of ‘liminality’ (Turner 1969).⁶² Victor Turner’s work⁶³ is interesting with regards to the study of exile and ideas about home, especially in view of the focus on ‘self’ as ‘other’, ‘rites of passage’, and the notion of liminality. The ‘rites’ are three phases which are defined as accompanying “every change of place, state, social position and age” (Turner, cited in Malkki

psychological exilic experience is managed both in terms of topic in his novel *Fragments* (1969) and as reflective of Armah’s own experience. In *Fragments* (1969), Armah’s protagonist, Baako, is a ‘been-to’ - an individual who has been-to a place abroad and returns to the homeland- who, upon returning to his country of birth from studying abroad, is met with a sense of internal estrangement; something least expected in his home surroundings.

⁶²Dis-placed people essentially represent a section of society which forcibly challenges ideas of classification and categorisation. Malkki suggests that two options are tied to the predicament of displacement. While the first might be understood mostly in relation to refugeeness, as a liminal collectivity which “tries to make itself ‘fit’”, the second ‘option’ is most relevant to the exilic condition, entailing an insistence on, and a creative exploitation of, another order of liminality (Malkki 1995: 4).

⁶³Drawing on studies produced by Arnold van Gennep (1922; 1960), Turner primarily concentrated on the ritual processes of the Ndembu community in Zambia (Turner 1969).

1995: 6).⁶⁴ Turner (1969) conceptualizes the idea of ‘structural invisibility’, whereby the subject of the ritual passage is in a liminal stage of being: “structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible’” (Turner 1969). Exiles, like those involved in ritual, are placed in a “moment in and out of time” (Turner 1969: 96). As ‘liminal entity’, fundamentally “betwixt and between”, an exile is no longer here and not yet there (Turner 1969: 107). The interplay between discourse about exile and discourse about difference, or ‘other’,⁶⁵ is paramount. ‘Otherness’ assumes seeing from a perspective outside of oneself; keenly linking to the various dimensions of exile, it regards seeing oneself in a position without place (the physical exile) *and* out of place (psychological exile). Just as home might be construed as “provisional” and “temporary” (Said 2001: 146-7), exile entails ongoing change in which the person ever feels their difference (Said 2001: 144).

Exile, physical and psychological, is certainly “strangely compelling” to think about (Said 2001: 144). While Said argues that “exiles force us to recognise the tragic fate of homelessness” (Said 2001:146) and Hannah Arendt (1973) refers to a “loss” in her work,⁶⁶ significantly, such ‘loss’ is about the one salient feature common to all experience of exile: home (in Feldman 2006: 10). If exile is a site of

⁶⁴The phases are: rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation (cited in Malkki 1995: 6).

⁶⁵The notion of ‘other’, and ‘otherness’, has been studied widely by scholars such as Bhaktin (1986); Bhabha (1994); Du Bois (1969); Lahiri (2001); Lamming (1992).

⁶⁶In relation to people tied to the of exilic condition, Arendt says: “The first loss... was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world” (Arendt, cited in Feldman 2006: 10).

alienation it is also one of reconnection (Paquet, in Lammington 1992: ix). Undoubtedly a junction, exile places human beings in a condition whereby they must cross borders and break through “barriers of thought and experience” (Said 2001: 147). Following the polarity of ‘home’ in terms of the ‘familiar’ and the ‘strange’, we might similarly reconfigure thoughts about ‘exile’. It is perhaps more of a natural phenomenon to us than we first think. One merely has to look at the Bible⁶⁷ to see that exile was there from the beginning of time (Durham-Peters, in Naficy 1999: 17). If, paradoxically, exile places a person in a position whereby home might be further construed, it allows for some newness of ‘self’. Does exile not helpfully clarify what we mean by home? Having experienced the condition, Kundera says: “Man and the world are bound together like the snail to its shell” (in Jackson 1995: 137). Certainly, in exile “the border between home and the world becomes confused”, indistinct, or even absent (Bhabha 1994: 141). Perhaps such confusion of boundaries, allows for space to *see* without restriction. It certainly seems that, once removed from home, one acquires an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, a plurality of being. When home becomes a foreign place it gives rise to an “originality of vision” (Said 2001: 14): in exile “one is not necessarily absent, but all the more present at home, in both place and memory” (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). Perhaps, then, only someone who has experienced exile and “detachment” from their home, “someone whose homeland is “sweet” but whose circumstances make it impossible to recapture that sweetness”, can truly answer questions about the meaning of home (Said 2001: 148).

⁶⁷Specifically, the Book of Genesis.

I do not negate the “terrible” of it. But, if the outcome is clarity then exile can be constructive (Said 2001: 144, 148). It might be strange but it is also effective in that exile’s exclusionary function is, in fact, undermined when an exile manages to reach heightened awareness; instead of restricted they become indelibly boundless. After all, “homelessness isn’t always experienced as a mutilation of one’s life, an insurmountable sorrow” (Jackson 1995: 2). Exile need only be a condition of homelessness if we configure home as static, non-moveable and a stationary fixture. In *Arrow of God* (1986), and through the portrayal of Ezeulu, Achebe says that one must, in fact, keep moving in order to achieve knowledge, to experience the world’s various offerings, and to feel at home: “The world is like Mask dancing... if you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place”. Disconnecting it from rupture, we should rather adorn exile with creativity and possibility. “Just as a unipolar construct of home is unacceptable”, we must be compelled to “examine further other possible ways in which ‘exile’ can be configured” (Achebe 1986: 46). Said creativity may undoubtedly assume literary form.

Meanwhile, illustrated either as something ‘terrible’ or of some ‘newness’, physical or psychological exile often sees home as being split between two places, looking back to the original home with nostalgia: the “long dream of home” (Salman Rushdie, cited in Naficy 1999: 19). Thus, between home and exile, stands the important intermediary of memory. After all, “human beings are not just a collection of bones and flesh”, nor solely made up of physical, or biological, substance; we are “emotions and feelings too” (Nyamnjoh: 25th May 2013), constituted by “affects and memories” (Vilaca, in Sahlin 2013: 8).

Memory itself is a hotly theorised subject of study.⁶⁸ Simply, memory might well be cognitively understood by any one of us as relating to a “variety of functions”, such as retaining facts and information, “remembering how to perform certain skills, or keeping a perhaps fortuitous selection of past experiences alive in our minds while others are forgotten” (Staiger and Steiner 2009: 3). But, what is regarded as ‘recollective memory’⁶⁹ is of most relevance here:

Requiring an effort of the mind to recall and prolong past experiences into the present and attaching particular significance to selected episodes and events, recollective memory establishes a causal connection between these past experiences and the present.

(Bergson and Russell, in Staiger and Steiner 2009: 3)

“Memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported” too (Casey, in Staiger and Steiner 2009: 1). Due to the ability of recollective memory to connect with particular places, places instil meaning and structure to the act of remembering, thus supporting the maintenance of memory (Staiger and Steiner 2009: 3). While reversing time is impossible: “you can’t go home again” (Wolfe, in Jackson 1995: 4), human beings often try to maintain a sense of stability by manipulating memories of place in cases of displacement.⁷⁰ In this sense, for better or for worse, home can be imbued with notions of the ideal.

⁶⁸Halbwachs (1950); Casey (1976); Nora (1989); Benjamin (2006). It has been considered in numerous contexts, including as a collective sociological phenomenon by Halbwachs (1950; 1980).

⁶⁹So called ‘memory par excellence’ in the early twentieth century (Bergson and Russell, cited in Staiger and Steiner 2009: 3).

⁷⁰Reasons for this have been thought of and written on by scholars in numerous disciplines. See Godziak and Shandy (2002), for example.

In *Les Lieux de Memoire* (1989), however, Pierre Nora says memory 'is life'; it is an 'actual phenomenon' (Nora 1989: 8).⁷¹ The places of memory⁷² obtain significance directly due to the failure of memory's physical milieu⁷³ (Nora 1989: 8). This reinforces that home is physical *and* memoried place.⁷⁴ As such, it is far easier to imagine home as existing in experiences of exile.

While Said (2001: 140) regards exiles as being "cut off from their roots", and Samuel Beckett retorts that "it is suicide to be abroad" (cited in Jackson 1995: 60), I would suggest that memory links home and exile, and in fact, in compensation for the loss of actuality, memory becomes a home itself.⁷⁵ Imagining home, a person can create for themselves a pleasant, albeit idealised, memory of it, lending a sense of safety: exactly what home is. Feldman suggests that "with the loss of... intimacy, people seek other ways of enacting and repeating connection" to 'home' (Feldman 2006: 11). From exile, then, memory serves the purpose of re-enacting and reclaiming an intimacy with home.

⁷¹The dichotomy of discourse versus reality reappears in Nora's thinking. He takes issue with the distinction between memory and history (Nora 1989: 8). History, he says, is merely analytical and a reconstruction (Nora 1989), "a representation of the past", and "of what is no longer" (Nora 1989: 8), while memory is "life" (Nora 1989: 8).

⁷²*Lieux de memoire*, 'places of memory' (Nora 1989: 8).

⁷³*Milieux de memoire*, 'real environments of memory' (Nora 1989: 8).

⁷⁴For study on therapeutic aspects of memory see Klein, in Staiger and Steiner (2009: 6).

⁷⁵Freud's psychoanalysis claims that "the past is still 'somewhere', waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject"; and argues that the memory will be rediscovered uncorrupted by subsequent events, forming a stable depiction of 'home' (in King 2000: 4).

Theory of the Subject: Ideas about the Self

The worlds contained within myself, the worlds I lived in
(Naipaul 1987: 135)

What remains uncomplicated is that home and exile are bound to human life, to subjects and the ‘self’. And, by extension, to their creativities: their literary works. But what do we conceive of when we think of the ‘self’? While challenging, the ‘self’ is an interesting and much debated field of study.⁷⁶ Whatever the important theories to have arisen from such research, across time and space a phenomenon such as the ‘self’, conceptualised in varying ways by varying groups of people, is likely to do anything but remain static. Too often there is presumption of “a valuation of individual autonomy and self-sufficiency that is cross-culturally far from universal” (Ferguson 2013: 224). The ‘self’ is not “universally salient as a conceptual category” (Rasmussen 2008: 31). Instead, it is something conceived of contextually, and is culture-bound. Although I broadly contextualise the ‘self’ as a post-Enlightenment phenomenon,⁷⁷ and show what has been conceived of the ‘self’ by researchers in general,⁷⁸ this is why I

⁷⁶Social scientists, anthropologists and psychologists, for instance, have been preoccupied with interrelations between the ‘self’, the mind, and the body for quite some time (Rasmussen 2008: 31). Multiple assessments have also emerged from spheres such as linguistics, politics and medicine (Rasmussen 2008: 46).

⁷⁷To note, though not elaborated on in this book, as a modern post-enlightenment phenomenon, and in relation to literary works, ‘Self’ could be linked to the rise and spread of the narrative genre of the autobiography as individuality began its public display in many forms of cultural practice. See Mascuch (1996).

⁷⁸Albeit from a category which may only be described as Western thought.

look to distinguish the ‘self’ as expressed in examples taken from African contexts.⁷⁹

From the earliest of civilisations, the ‘self’ has always been imagined. The Greeks for instance, first preoccupied with “the idea of a human’s true self”, were interested in identity as the individual’s persona and the ‘self’ as the route to understanding more about the human psyche (Sorabji 2006: 1).⁸⁰ One’s identity can be construed as a “particular set of traits, beliefs and allegiances that... gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being” (Hall 2004: 3). In contrast, the idea of the ‘self’ implies a “degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity” (Hall 2004: 3). It is helpful to think of ‘subjectivity’ as interchangeable with the ‘self’⁸¹ in order to see that as a concept, and as opposed to ‘identity’ and rather a close ally of ‘subject’, it allows us to

⁷⁹The ‘self’ also yields much wider challenges in cultural and cross-cultural studies, and comparisons. As Rasmussen (2008) suggests, every human being has ideas about the ‘self’ and the related concept of identity, as well as the relationships enlisted in such discourse (e.g. race, class, gender, age etc.). It might come to carry “heavy cultural baggage from the experience of the researcher” (Rasmussen 2008: 32), but it is also attached to historical, political and cultural assumptions. And, to note, westernised ideas cannot be detached from historical and political contexts: many ideas “emerge from colonial and post-colonial educational systems where Euro-American paradigms are influential” (Mudimbe, Rasmussen 2008: 32).

⁸⁰It cannot be denied that the terms ‘self’ and ‘identity’ are related, but they are different from one another, too. Certainly, in this book I mean to connote something other than ‘identity’.

⁸¹Hall (2004): among others. To note: I do not mean to ignore the many scholars who have worked on and theorized ideas about this term: ‘Subject’. Great work has been produced by scholars such as Michel Foucault, especially with regards to *The Subject and Power* (1982) in which he argues his main project was to investigate the subject, and not power. Mbembe (1992) is another who documents extensively on discourses of interrelations between subjectivities in his work on the post-colony.

question where identity comes from, how it is constructed, and whether we have any control over it (Hall 2004: 3). Another useful, interchangeable term may be ‘personhood’ as it is suggestive of a sort of totality; a condition of humanity.

Despite its complexities, the ‘self’, can be understood on four different levels: the ‘self’ as “a subject to itself, an ‘I’”; ‘subject’ as “an ‘Other’”; ‘subject’ ascribed to social knowledge and ascribed to “institutions that circumscribe its terms of being”; and, lastly, ‘subject’ as physical body, “closely dependent upon its physical environment” (Gagnier, in Hall 2004: 2-3). While one need merely establish the ‘self’ in order to live with one’s ‘self’, our place in the world is also woven in relationships and interactions with other ‘selves’.⁸² The ‘self’ is in constant relation to the ‘other’ because we relate to our-selves in relation to one another; or, one and other. In “people-centric social systems” of southern Africa, “persons were [and are] understood not as monadic individuals, but as nodes in systems of relationships” (Ferguson 2013: 226). Of course, this is a distinguishing factor of the very notion of human nature (Rasmussen 2008: 44). Although there is danger in some anthropological thinking and its denial of ‘subjectivity’,⁸³ particularly in Africa, it remains true that “people want to be connected” (Englund: 25th May 2013). Careful in the usage and conceptualisation of ‘individualism’, it remains that “it is an abstract idea” because situationally it is played out communally (25th May 2013). The

⁸²The ‘other’ is a hugely diverse subject of study, and is irrefutably connected to the subject of the ‘self’. Among those who have written extensively on the ‘other’, in varying contexts, are: Bhabha (1990); Said (1978); Attridge (1999).

⁸³Englund denotes that the term ‘subjectivity’ has become the new buzzword for ‘self’ or ‘individual’ among researchers most recently (Englund: 25th May 2013).

‘self’ is more about what it means to be an ‘I’ in order to establish “the unity and coherence” of the human being (Fichte, in Neuhouser 1990: 1).

Regarded as post-Enlightenment notions,⁸⁴ theories about the ‘self’ and ‘other’ became heavily politicised in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hall 2004: 5).⁸⁵ Most relevant here is what emanated from such thinking. That is, that individuals’ self-consciousness was recognised as never existing in isolation but always in relationship with others.⁸⁶ With regards to the personal as the political,⁸⁷ I understand that the individual is the collective. Anthropologists have long insisted that relational persons are “constituted by those relations” (Ferguson 2013: 226). It is, therefore, not about eliminating representation of the collective to look only at the individual: individuals make up a society, so concentrating on the ‘self’ is bound to discussion on the collective. Indeed, in certain cultural contexts, without a family the ‘self’ is rendered incomplete.

There is a rich foundation of material from Africa concerning concepts of ‘self’.⁸⁸ Some circles of people in African contexts do not comprehend the ‘self’ as an autonomous figure.⁸⁹ During the independence movements,⁹⁰

⁸⁴See Kant and his theory of the self and maturity in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1964).

⁸⁵Theorists included Hegel and Marx.

⁸⁶See Hegel (1977)

⁸⁷The phrase, ‘the personal as political’, was first coined by feminist movements in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

⁸⁸Even if this term is ‘personhood’.

⁸⁹Studies in anthropology have produced large ethnographic and theoretical literatures in relation to the topic on the continent. See, for example, Radcliffe- Brown (1965) (cited in Ferguson 2013); Englund (1996).

⁹⁰Across Africa, and specifically with regards to the 1950’s and 1960’s.

the Ngoni people,⁹¹ for example, understood self-freedom and autonomy of the individual as equated to collective emancipation⁹² (Ferguson 2013: 225). “The notion of the individual self is indefensible” among Mozambicans residing in Malawi, too (Englund 1998: 1166). Englund says this relates to “the cultural constructions of personhood which, in Africa, often represents the moral person as being entangled in relationships”, but also resonates with “a more general human condition in which sociality is the prerequisite for the experiencing self” (Englund 1998: 1166). In a third case, there is little to suggest any individual core to Nigerian Yoruba women’s oracle texts, ‘*oriki*’ (Barber 1991).⁹³

Yet, at times the agency of a particular individual *is* crucial in an African context. In keeping with the Yoruba, regular Ifa divination relies on the workings of a professional diviner called a ‘Babalawo’ (Morton-Williams, et al 1966: 406). During Ifa, the Babalawo consults an oracle in order to predict an individual’s destiny. Here, the individual ‘self’ is fundamental and separate from the collective. Meanwhile, Achebe says that “the Igbo⁹⁴ are second to none in their respect of the individual personality”; he says that these people “postulate an unprecedented uniqueness for the individual by making him or her the sole creation and purpose of a unique god-agent, *chi*” (Achebe 1989: 57-

⁹¹In southern Africa.

⁹² A notion contrary to western ideals for Africa and Africans (Ferguson 2013: 225).

⁹³A form of oral praise poetry performed by women living in the Oyo state in western Nigeria. See Barber (1991). Similarly, Eades (1980) has written about Yoruba ritual festivals, and reports that certain ceremonies annually require participation from the entire town’s population (1980: 120).

⁹⁴Also in Nigeria.

58).⁹⁵ However, Achebe goes on to say that while “no two persons... are created and accompanied by the same *chi*”, the unsurpassed individuality is indelibly and democratically connected “to the group in practical, social matters” (Achebe 1998: 57-58).

Conclusively, “the dichotomy of ‘individual’ and ‘group’” is false (Englund 1998: 1166). It is more useful to view such categories as indivisible, not as separate, but always working together, the individual should be “imagined as a social microcosm” (Strathern, in Sahlins 2013: 24). Because of relationships, people “live each other’s lives and die each other’s deaths” (Carsten, in Sahlins 2013: 28). To understand the ‘self’, we must understand it as being informed by and resting on “relational, situational and enacted factors” (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). Indeed, the fundamental link between individuals cannot be denied as we all begin our lives attached to another being. The mother is the first home: “the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother’s womb” (Freud, cited in Jackson 1995: 3); “home is like a child in the womb” (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). In a Malawian context “the body, especially the female body, assumes equal significance to the house as the core to this world” (Englund 1998: 1172). It is that we have never been one and alone in this world: “the world over, human begetters are connected to their offspring by a great variety of transmitted substances – blood... semen... milk” (Sahlins 2013: 4).

Relational factors highlight kinship as undoubtedly connected to the ‘self’. Kinship is relational ‘selves’: we “are intrinsic to one another’s existence”. Sahlins calls it a “mutuality of being” (Sahlins 2013: 2). To elaborate,

⁹⁵See also Achebe: *Home and Exile* (2000: 14).

Malinowski⁹⁶ conveys the devotion and artistic care that goes into the cultivation of yam gardens: the gardeners “grew far more than they needed...did more work... than was required...-tidying the plots, building beautiful fences” (Malinowski, in Hallam and Ingold 2007: 26). Among Malawians, Englund (1998) says that the cultivation of land is about identity, and that land is sensual in this sense— tied to emotional and psychological aspects of ‘self’. While Malinowski’s gardener represents the ‘self’, assigned personal creativity, “the growth of the yams, and the appearance of the yam garden, reflected, or embodied... personal *and* social enhancement” (Malinowski, in Hallam and Ingold 2007: 26, my emphasis). Furthermore, the yams are seen to move along circuits of social relationships and are mobilized in games of alliance (Malinowski, in Hallam and Ingold 2007: 26). As a gardener’s status climbed so too did the community’s. Here, I wish to impress that yams are symbolic of creativity. The yams could be poems. Poetry may be thought of as a “local model of social being” (Barber, in Hallam and Ingold 2007: 26). Such an idea connotes that personal creativity is “analogous to and deeply connected” with communal experience; an experience “constituted through constantly renegotiated relations with others” (Barber, in Hallam and Ingold 2007: 26). In a Ghanaian context, “what is crucial in traditional Ashanti law, moral values, ritual practice, and personal sentiment is the notion that the ‘abusua’ as lineage is “one person”, *nipa koro!*” (Fortes, in Sahlins 2013: 1). Such sentiment shows that at the core of many singles is a single whole. If social life is about understanding the ‘self’ then creating the ‘self’ is paramount. Meanwhile, equated to

⁹⁶In the example of the Trobriander society (see Hallam and Ingold 2007: 26).

procreation, we might come to understand the ‘self’ as a foetus: a core entity protected by a barrier of sorts, a wall of kinship.

As the ‘self’ is “entangled with environments which they have become intertwined with” (Nyamnjoh: 25th May 2013) so ‘mutuality of being’ also regards physical environment as the ‘self’.⁹⁷ Thus, the ‘self’ manifests in the experience of the land in which it dwells⁹⁸ as a “transfer of being” occurs between a human being and its physical environment. “The human inhabitants merge with the land”; like a child is to a parent, “land is not so much owned as part of one’s substance”⁹⁹(Jolly, in Sahllins 2013: 6).

While intrinsically connected by physicality and the reality of procreation, ‘mutuality of being’ extends to the third entity: “ancestors, gods... spirits” (Sahllins 2013: 1). An accomplished sense of social status bridges this world and the next; and having this “exterior soul” as ancestor is at the core of what is meant by kinship,¹⁰⁰ due to the “network” it reveals (Sahllins 2013: 20). Spiritually assembled, the ‘self’ is comprised of a kind of collective ephemeral consciousness. The importance of the ancestor is paramount¹⁰¹ as its presence reveals the idea of “mystical interdependence” (Wilson, in Sahllins 2013: 46). Certainly ‘interdependence’

⁹⁷As Gagnier argues (in Hall 2004: 3).

⁹⁸Michael Jackson’s work on Aboriginal people stresses that every individual is bonded not only to the parent figure but also to a particular physical place (1995: 36).

⁹⁹‘Substance’ here refers back to the physical reality of procreation.

¹⁰⁰And, thus, ‘mutuality of being’.

¹⁰¹Holmes adds that, this “suggests many of us have discovered we are more than our physical biology”. The Greeks certainly saw two fundamental threads to life which were said to co-exist: the ‘body-spirit unity’ (Holmes, in Flanagan and Jupp 2007: 25).

speaks of reliance upon one another, be it in this world or the next. As the land and the ancestors are believed to be cordially connected, so it is that “the land and the people are alive and akin” (Sahlins 2013: 7).

If ‘selves’ assemble kinship, and “kinsmen are members of one another”, it fits that “experience is diffused among them” (Sahlins 2013: 44). Moreover, implied in the belief that people’s bones “are of a greater undifferentiated totality”, what happens to one happens to all (Bloch, in Sahlins 2013: 45). In remembering that the poet is the ‘self’ I am grappling with in this book, this leads me to comment on the position of the Poet in society. Logically, with all that has been said, a poet harbours reason for and capability of communicating appropriate feelings and values of his or her ancestry to others. The idea “of society... as a prison house from which the individual must escape in order to find space and fulfilment” to write is false in this regard (Achebe 1989: 53). The Poet as spokesperson need not deny the voice of the wider cultural milieu either.¹⁰² I am not denying that the writer does have a role in society. Indeed, as is universal, “African writers see as their duty the need to concentrate on the social... problems of their countries” (Muoneke 1994: 1). While Chimombo may think it an unfair question to ask what the task of a writer is, maintaining that it is “to write and write well”, he says that in the meantime it is true that the writer “is also expected to be more articulate in areas that concern the ordinary person” (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 47).

¹⁰²Achebe argues that this was particularly made an issue of oral text gave way to an abundance of written literature: “one of the critical consequences of the transition from oral traditions to written forms of literature is the emergence of individual authorship” (1989: 47). He says that “Western literature played a central role in promoting the ideal of individual autonomy...” (Achebe 1989: 52-3).

Moreover, like Wole Soyinka, I think the writer plays an enormous part in the sociability of the community and that it is time for a response to the ‘self’¹⁰³ (Soyinka, in Muoneke 1994: 22).¹⁰⁴ But to say that “the function of the artist..., in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assume a responsibility to reflect public concerns” alone, and needs to restrain from preoccupation “with his puny ego” (Chinweizu, in Muoneke 1994: 17), conflicts with all understanding of the interdependence of ‘mutuality of being’ and with how a ‘self’ writes in order to inform of one *and* of one another.

¹⁰³Soyinka, in fact, fashions the writer as male: him having to “respond to this essence of *himself*” (my emphasis, Soyinka, in Muoneke 1994: 22).

¹⁰⁴“The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society *and* the voice of vision of his own time” (Soyinka, in Muoneke 1994: 22).

Chapter 4

The Context: Malawi as place, its history and its people

Malawi

‘Malawi’. There can be no better introduction to the character of this country than what is revealed in its name. Originally called ‘Maravi’, ‘Land of Fire’, the name denotes something important about the country: firstly, that the land itself takes on significance for its people, and secondly, that fire has historically been a natural element impregnated with meaning for Malawians. Notably, Mbona, the rainmaker, is the country’s greatest ceremonial figure,¹⁰⁵ and rain shrines have acted as a huge part of people’s lives for means as simple as reliable cultivation of land¹⁰⁶ (Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985: 10). The name was changed from ‘Maravi’ to ‘Nyasaland’ in colonial times because of the giant lake which expands across three-quarters of the country– ‘nyasa’ meaning ‘lake’ in ChiYao.¹⁰⁷ Then, as the country won independence, ‘Malawi’ was born.

While Malawi is a landlocked country in south-eastern Africa, sandwiched between Mozambique to the south and east, Tanzania to the north, and Zambia to the west of it, water¹⁰⁸ is integral to peoples’ way of life. The association with the natural elements here relates to certain topographical

¹⁰⁵And a subject dealt with largely in many narratives and poems.

¹⁰⁶As well as for more complex, ritualistic means.

¹⁰⁷Colonialists in Malawi called the Lake ‘Lake Nyasa’: ‘Lake Lake’!

¹⁰⁸Most notably, the Lake.

features, as well as to the fact that Malawi is a particularly customary¹⁰⁹ country – retaining beliefs in myth, for instance, and practices of yesterday’s yesterday which are just as relevant today as they were then. Nature is fundamental to Malawians: animals, plants, especially trees, and the soil are all imbued with various meanings and persistent beliefs.¹¹⁰ Although major towns and cities¹¹¹ have been growing in size and number,¹¹² the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) maintains that “the population of Malawi is predominately rural” (unfpamalawi.org: 2013). Certainly the rurality of the place is striking. Walking beneath the Jacaranda and amidst the tea on the estates of Mulanje Mountain or through Zomba, a town strewn with overhanging trees and scented by maize and timber, is testimony to this. The topography of Malawi is undoubtedly diverse: composed of rolling mountain plateaus, eroding escarpment, and shorelines, marked by flat plains, all interspersed with steep, rocky cliffs and hills. Such terrain and agricultural ground is crucial to the country’s economy which relies on the production of major exports like tobacco, tea, groundnuts, maize (corn) and cotton (Nelson et.al 1987: ix). Perhaps it is not surprising that the natural world plays such a central role in peoples’ lives and the activity within Malawi.

¹⁰⁹ By this I mean ‘traditional’ but I am aware of the politics surrounding the term, so, in turn, I prefer to use ‘customary’.

¹¹⁰ Two examples (further explored in the book) might be the chameleon or the fig tree.

¹¹¹ Such as Lilongwe in the central region, Blantyre to the south, and Mzuzu in the north.

¹¹² UNData online suggests that in 2011 the urban population was 15.7 % of the total population. The World Bank’s estimates agree, stating that in 1990 urban population was 12% and by 2011 it was 16%.

In order to contextualise the country in terms of the specific period dealt with in this book, it is important to provide a historical overview before moving on to explore the literary landscape of the times addressed. Although Malawi is not alone in the way an elitist party negotiated its independence from colonial rule, what needs to be stressed is the astonishing influence of the “one man: Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda” (Jones and Manda 2006: 203).

Enter Zomba town, the site of colonial and post-colonial rule, where streets are lined with official buildings and high-ceilinged houses from which extensive gardens flow, and one is greeted by the essence of European control in Malawi. In the nineteenth century, interests included British and Portuguese expeditions alike, performed on the basis of two undertakings: the Christian mission and commerce. When the crown declared a protectorate over various regions of ‘Nyasaland’ in 1889 the British Government sought to take its first steps in Malawi. The people of Malawi were then governed by the British up until 1964, when, on the 6th of July, the country “became an independent state” (Pachai 1973: 244). Independence was obtained on the presumption that Sir Glyn Jones, a British Governor-General, would stand as head of state for two more years under a “monarchical constitution” alongside Dr. Hastings Banda: the country’s first Prime Minister (Pachai 1973: 244). Directed by the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the “monarchical constitution was replaced by a republican constitution” in July 1966 (Pachai 1973: 245). The MCP was the same party to later nominate Dr. Banda as Life President of both state and government in September 1970.

Like many nationalist movements across Africa, the MCP originally sprung out of a “response to colonialism”.

However, it was a proposal made by the British to create a federation incorporating the colonies of Northern and Southern Rhodesia¹¹³ and 'Nyasaland', "for the economic and strategic advantage of the metropole", which gathered forceful support behind the Congress movement in Malawi (Jones and Manda 2006: 203).¹¹⁴ While young and old composed membership, there were factions within the Congress. Particularly said with regards a small number of young elitist men who made up the majority of leadership at the time of the proposed federation. It was these members who faced converting elders and encouraging members to also follow their cause. Banda, however, seemed undeterred by such tensions and challenges. He was a bold man. One only has to look at his being sworn in, at Kamuzu Stadium in Malawi, on the 6th July 1971 (Pachai 1973: 245). As early on as this in his ruling, Banda proceeded to adopt the Ngoni praise name *Ngwazi* – 'Conqueror' (Chirambo 2007: 79). Prior to even this, and due to his leadership of people to independence in 1963 in Malawi, the dictator took on the name *Mpulumutsi*, which translates as 'Messiah' (Chirambo 2007: 79).

Despite residing in Britain in 1958, Banda's qualities spoke to the members of Congress, young and old alike. Banda was after all of a conservative age¹¹⁵ and occupation¹¹⁶ that appealed to the elders in Congress, and, while his command of the English language was of excellent calibre, the younger leaders were attracted to his strong opinions against the federation. These factors contributed to Banda's

¹¹³Now Zambia and Zimbabwe respectively.

¹¹⁴So called the 'Nyasaland African Congress'

¹¹⁵Around 60 years old in 1964.

¹¹⁶As a trained doctor.

invitation from the Congress to become a party leader. Banda's desire for control seemed quite evident from this moment. On acceptance of the invitation, Banda declared that he would only join rank "if he was guaranteed the presidency of the Congress party, the right to hand-pick the executive and extensive powers to run the nationalist movement in whatever way he thought right". From here, Banda made swift movements to "consolidate his power", altering the MCP in order to suit his personal advancement (Chirambo 2007: 79).

The relationship between Banda and his cabinet did not take long to deteriorate; from 1964 things simply grew worse for Malawi (Moto 1999: 3). A speech Banda made at a meeting of the Organization for African Unity marked the beginnings of his *absolute* dictatorship (Moto 1999: 3). During the speech, Banda invited his cabinet on to a podium where he proceeded to humiliate them in front of a huge audience. Publically, he named and shamed those who had in any way criticised him. His intention was to see that the country was "vigilant in seeking out traitors be they men or women, and to denounce them unhesitatingly so that they could be dealt with" (cited in Moto 1999: 4). Thus, treason came to imply any word of criticism against Banda, and it became clear that in whatever form, be it said, written or simply referred to, such criticism would be sought out and punished. Having voiced his needs at this meeting Banda was now able to "consolidate his absolute rule over Malawi" (Moto 1999: 4), and so he began to brutally terrorize the country.

Besides coercing his associates and declaring a ruthless administration, the President deployed a number of means to transform the MCP into a personal system of power; he focused on elevating elements of his learned British-ness with

qualities of fervent nationalism. It became apparent that his main aim was to dominate as though he were a colonial administrator; he always spoke in English and dressed in clothes worn by the British: “even on the hottest of days he dressed... in the familiar three-piece suit and black homburg hat, with a beige raincoat... and brown leather gloves” (cited in Jones and Manda 2006: 203). Banda created nationalist groups, such as the Young Pioneers,¹¹⁷ and a women’s league. These groups thrived on an intolerant culture of politics focused upon hero-worship and intimidation of the masses.¹¹⁸ For the unwillingness to accept secular authority many people were beaten, or lost their lives; others fled to exile.

The brutality practiced throughout Malawi evidently hindered the general population and their activities. But, turning to contextualise this brief political timeframe within a focused literary landscape, I want now to stress the effect such a regime had on the arts and artists in the county.

Long before the advent of print, the spoken word was the main method of dissemination in Malawi. This went for both longer narrative telling, such as in folk stories, myths and legends, and for shorter forms like anecdotes, proverbs and riddles (Chimombo 1996: 2). While the “beginning of written literature in Malawi” was marked by the arrival of the Christian missionaries,¹¹⁹ and their recording, transcribing and translating works into various collections, the first decades of the twentieth century saw publications by Malawians in established writings about “histories, customs and traditions”

¹¹⁷A youth group.

¹¹⁸The Young Pioneers headed the action in terms of seeking out all those in opposition of Banda, for instance.

¹¹⁹Those arriving after the explorations of Dr. Livingstone in the mid-nineteenth century (Chimombo 1996: 2).

(Chimombo 1996: 2).¹²⁰ In terms of fiction in the vernacular,¹²¹ the Margaret Wong Prize, set up by the Institute for African Languages in 1929, provided widespread inspiration for writers.¹²² Malawi's "grandfather of the literary tradition", Samuel Nthara, won the first prize in 1933 with his novel, *Nthondo* (1966) (Chimombo 1996: 3). A fictional biography, *Nthondo* revolves around a Chewa man growing up in a community exposed to both local custom and western, Christian values.¹²³ Later, toward the middle of the 1960's, Malawian fiction in English bloomed.¹²⁴ With similar regard to Nthara's vernacular, Legson Kayira's novel *The Looming Shadow* (1967) deals with "conflicts between an African society and colonial rule" (Chimombo 1996: 4). About seven years later, in 1974, the same author wrote *The Detainee* depicting the lives of characters experiencing authoritarianism. The three named titles above, one in Chichewa and the other two in English, are illustrative of what has been termed the 'first generation' of writers in Africa at large. It is, however, important to note that Malawi is generally considered an oddity in terms of the so-called 'generations'¹²⁵ of African literature. Associated with specific

¹²⁰See also Lwanda (2008).

¹²¹Chichewa.

¹²²True in Malawi, and across Africa.

¹²³ Numerous other narratives, dealing with similar issues and bestriding the two worlds of Malawian folk story and modern style literature, were produced during this period in Malawi. For example, Steven Kumakanga's *Nzzeru Zakale* (Ancient Wisdom) (in Chimombo 1996: 2). The year 1949 is of particular importance, and interest here, as a scheme joining Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland was established in order to aid publication across the regions (Chimombo 1996: 3).

¹²⁴The first novel was Aubrey Kachingwe's *No Easy Task*, published in 1966.

¹²⁵Mostly determined by thematic trends.

eras, 'first generation' writing mostly depicts repression under colonialism and the 'second' of gaining independence. With view to the country's history, however, differentiation between the first and second generation in Malawi's literature is harder to distinguish. Second generation writers thematically aligned with those of the first generations' earlier anti-colonial accord directly because the country moved from one dictator to another.¹²⁶

If vernacular fiction mushroomed rapidly as of the late 1920's, publications in drama and poetry took a while longer to develop. There was very little vernacular drama in the 1930's for instance, and from the 1960's to the 1980's there was nothing until Steve Chimombo's *Wachiona Ndani?* (1983). While drama in English was popularized in the 1960's and 1970's, printing such text was rare (Chimombo 1996: 5). *Nine Malawian Plays*, edited by James Gibbs, was the first collection to be published, followed by scarcity again between that and Chimombo's *The Rainmaker* (1981) (Chimombo 1996: 5). Similarly only two collections of poetry, *Ntchito ya Pakamwa*

¹²⁶ This was an inevitable consequence of Malawi's particular predicament under President Banda. In comparison, so-called second generation contributors in other African countries moved to deal with themes of post-colonialism and socio-political circumstances thereafter (Olaoluwa 2008: 5-6). As Olaoluwa suggests, however, "there is no cut and dried approach to the delineation of these literary generations in African literature" (2008: 1). Of course, the way in which studies are conducted often dictates categorization, and it must be realised that the paradigm tends to consist of overlapping factors (Olaoluwa 2008: 5-6). Chimombo adds to this with an important query: "how do you take people like Jack Mapanje? He was writing in the Banda days, he was writing in the Muluzi days, and he's still writing. I am writing, and I was writing in the Banda days. So in terms of generation, I would not like to put myself in the older generation [the 'first generation'] because we're still writing" (in Lee 2010: 36).

(“Work of the Mouth”) and *Ndakatulo za M’Chichewa* (“Chichewa poetry”), by Chadza and Gwengwe, existed in the vernacular up until the 1980’s (Chimombo 1996: 4). And, although July 1971 witnessed the publication of the first collection of Malawian poems in English, *Mau: 39 Poems from Malawi* (Writer’s Group: 1971), which includes writing by poets such as Frank Chipasula and Jack Mapanje, “the poetry harvest is just as meagre as drama” (Chimombo 1996: 4).

The lack of publications was certainly not down to a dearth of creativity in Malawi (Olaoluwa 2008: 9). It was despite heavy censorship under Banda,¹²⁷ that creativity persevered. While often in secret and by subtle means, it can be assumed that the establishment of artistic gatherings, for example, began out of a need to document the times. One such gathering became known as the Malawian ‘Writers Workshops’. The group employed “the subtleties of language and imagery to disguise resistance voices” (Mphande 1996: 96). It had to adopt ambiguity in form and content as “nothing could be explicit, everything had to be indirect” in Malawi (White, in Mphande 1996: 96). Mphande says Anthony Nazombe’s poetry is perhaps “typical of the use of indirection to disguise political commentary” (Mphande 1996: 96): “many of my poems are personal... reflecting my experience on the campus, at home within the family or back in the village with my relations. But ...I also ...talk about political issues in an indirect way” (Nazombe, in Mphande 1996: 96). It was the determination of individual writers involved that enabled literary spirit to grow and remain in Malawi.¹²⁸ The earliest Writers Workshop to reach national

¹²⁷See Lwanda (2008).

¹²⁸See Mphande (1996) for further documentation of the groups’ initiatives.

recognition was established in 1970 by a “number of students and staff”¹²⁹ who met privately at the Chancellor College in Zomba “to discuss published and unpublished poetry on a regular weekly basis” (Chimombo 1996: 10). Later, the group grew in number and, significantly, evolved on campus. Importantly, it was this establishment which enabled a collaboration of writers to support each other through the Banda era, and, in turn, led to the publication of the first anthology of poems¹³⁰ by Malawians (Chimombo 1996: 15).

Meanwhile, the institution of draconian law, particularly in the 1960’s, continued to have unprecedented influence on the impingement of artistic expression in the country. In fact, it was such “pervasive influence” that this can be but a mere summary (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 1). The Writers’ Workshops were not spared:

the university declared that staff should not fraternize with students. People were afraid to have this kind of interchange of ideas. The Writers’ Workshop was suspect because it was one of the best places for mingling

(Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 47)

That similar issues recurred across the literary ‘generations’ in Malawi is a telling detail. As well as highlighting the reason behind the limited production of published texts, writing associated with oppression is easily explained when one considers the rules demanded by the President. Of particular hindrance to the arts¹³¹ was ‘The

¹²⁹The Workshop was founded by writers like Jack Mapanje and James Ng’ombe (cited in Lee 2010: 36).

¹³⁰*Man: 39 Poems from Malawi* (Writer’s Group:1971).

¹³¹In all manifestations.

Censorship Board'. Set up by an Act of Parliament in 1968, within the milieu of Banda's repressive politics, the Board imposed so much control and power that "it dictated the public and private lives of the nation for the next thirty years" (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 1). To keep literature specifically in hand: "the writer had to be careful where he went, how he talked and to whom, what he talked and wrote about" as there were 'Special Branch' men who were assigned the role of informer (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 1). Even family members could be one of these moles. The muzzling is quite apparent in the texts of the time;¹³² it goes some way to explaining Malawian writers'¹³³ use of metaphor and poetic idiom.¹³⁴ Steve Chimombo and Jack Mapanje exploit the figure of the chameleon to evoke the temperamental attitude of the state, for instance. Similarly, Frank Chipasula's, preference of 'nightwatcher' is "his own way of apprehending tyranny and interrogating its perpetrators" (Msiska, in Olaoluwa 2008: 9). The chameleon further aids expression of the poet's self.¹³⁵ Disguising one's

¹³² See David Rubadiri's *No Bride Price* (1967) for instance, or *The Detainee* (1974) by Legson Kayira. Or, indeed, the five poets dealt with in this book subversively account for the oppression under Banda.

¹³³ That is, (if they can at all) those who "fall into the category of second generation writers in the broader African context": of post-colonial, independence writers (Olaoluwa 2008: 9).

¹³⁴ This is not solely a Malawian feature. Neither should it be construed on the basis of negativity alone: the famous Polish novelist Tadeusz Konwicki once noted the following in view of employing such metaphoric skill: ". . . writing under censorship has positive aspects. It can be like gambling or doing battle. The fact of having to face a censor can mobilize a writer to create ways of bypassing censorship; it forces the writer to employ metaphors which raise the piece of writing to a higher level" (Mapanje, in Peterson 1988: 7).

¹³⁵ The chameleon is utilised across varied contexts, it is true. Speaking with regards to the time after Banda, and since administration in Malawi

movements, or indeed changing one's colour like the chameleon, was imperative for survival in Malawi. The seriousness of employing strict language tactics can be gleaned from the possible repercussions if the censorship rules were not adhered to. While writing could, and did, lead to detainment¹³⁶ and external exile¹³⁷ in some instances, ultimately it was a matter of life and death for others: the journalist Mkwapatira Mhango¹³⁸ fled to Zambia to escape persecution in 1989 only to be found and assassinated in a firebomb attack on a house shortly afterwards (Human Rights Watch 1989). State censorship undeniably affected artistic self-expression in Malawi, it was "more politically powerful... than in other countries". Chimombo's *Napolo Poems* (1987), for instance, were banned before they even went to print, and

has changed under Presidents Muluzi and Mutharika, Harri Englund says that Malawi, not unlike numerous other postcolonial nations in Africa, is led by "a culture of *chameleon politics*" (Englund 2001: 17). He says that the chameleonic nature of state leaders in Malawi has led to what Chichewa speakers call *kupusitsa*, the "fooling", of the populace by the political elite (Englund 2001: 18). Just as Banda made the country "stupid" by his outright capacity to rule, so subsequent leaders followed in his footsteps: "chameleons may have changed their colour but not their motives" (Englund 2001: 18).

¹³⁶Approximately 43 years old, Jack Mapanje was detained on the 25th of September 1987 by Malawian police in Zomba town for recent poems he had written as well as evidence of "an address delivered at a conference at Stockholm in 1986 under the title 'Censoring the African Poem: Personal Reflections'" (Vail and White 1990: 27).

¹³⁷For example, Frank Chipasula.

¹³⁸ Still referred to in today's news in Malawi: <http://www.maravipost.com/scope/op-ed/3584-malawi%E2%80%99s-party-of-%E2%80%98death-and-darkness%E2%80%99-scared-of-%E2%80%98man-of-god%E2%80%99-rev-chakwera.html>

one poem, “The Death Song”, had to be cut out altogether.¹³⁹ If whatever the Censorship Board decided was “more or less a political order”, “it was not necessarily a political question”: its nature was unpredictable and fickle at times. Manuscripts were thoroughly checked for religious reasons on the basis that one of the Board’s chairmen was a Reverend, for example: “the word ‘hell’ was enough to annoy the censors” (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 37-38).

The repercussions of such laws were experienced widely. “Publications by non-Malawians were likewise heavily censored” and bookstores had to send manuscripts to the Board before stock arrived (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 2). Quashing the independence of the press newspapers were pro-government, too.¹⁴⁰ Although left much to one side in this book, dance, music and the visual arts were equally affected. Overall, “perhaps the most cynical exploitation occurred when the MCP government asked the artists to participate in a party function or fundraising activity for charity” (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 4). Annual events, such as conventions of parliament, and the President’s party functions, would regularly require a “cultural evening, which would involve a play, a popular band, or a recital of some kind”. While participation was said to be voluntary, in actual fact refusal to attend “would be tantamount to political dissent... none dared to decline” (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 4). In view of the above, President Banda

¹³⁹It is also relevant to note that works by other African writers, such as Chinua Achebe, as well as British novelists like George Orwell, were banned from Malawi at the time (Mphande 1996: 83).

¹⁴⁰In fact, it was only in 1992 that a handful of independently owned newspapers emerged (Chimombo and Chimombo 1996: 26).

systematically drained his country of individual life; depriving it of a voice, he stripped Malawi of all its culture.

Reaction to this attempted subjugation was varied. One response, particularly adopted by poets, was to use the English language (Mapanje, in Lea 2007). This was sparked by an announcement in 1968 that declared Chichewa the national language in Malawi. While it might seem a paradox to say that poets fervently fought against their own language,¹⁴¹ it was directly because “Banda tried to establish... [Chichewa] like the French Academy, choosing which words were in and which were out”, that poets came to deny support of the language (Mapanje, in Lea 2007).¹⁴²

It is easy to imagine that such change and repression significantly “affected the free creation of literature” in this period (Magalasi 2000: 1). Jack Mapanje says:

censorship is deliberately established to discourage the development of authentic African culture. The objective of censorship is to humiliate writers or trim them to manageable size. Writers are meant... to feel that they are not good citizens

(Mapanje, in Peterson 1988: 110)

Appropriately, and adding to Mapanje’s statement, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o says that as a main feature of the postcolonial condition in Africa (of which Malawi arguably was) “...the state tries to impose silence on the population as a whole”

¹⁴¹In view of the fact poets in other African countries seemed to be fighting for their home languages, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in Kenya and his fight for literature in Kikuyu, or in Tanzania with the recognition of Kiswahili as the official language.

¹⁴²Mapanje says that by modifying the language, Banda destroyed Chichewa, and that “as a result, it was not creative” (Mapanje, in Lea 2007).

(Ngugi 1997: 27). Only in the aftermath of such events can the totality of their effects really be understood, however.¹⁴³ “As soon as the poets realised that they could write without fear, harassment, detention, or accidentalization, their voices did become louder and their pens bolder” (Magalasi 2000: 77). But, even as the country started to emerge from the crisis, with Banda stepping down in 1994,¹⁴⁴ “many poets contributed one piece and then disappeared... some of the poets were anonymous, others used initials, yet others used pseudonyms” (Magalasi 2000: 78). From this it is clear that fears in Malawi and the legacies of Banda’s regime were not to be dispelled overnight. Despite declining censorship, the artist “is still held in low esteem”;¹⁴⁵ and, neither the publishing scene, nor the limited extent to which younger generations are emerging as fully established writers in Malawi is encouraging in a post-Banda era. While some would disagree in view of the kind of system that has evolved since the Dictator left office, it has been argued that Banda established “what was probably the most repressive, corrupt, predatory and violent political system in Africa”, the legacy of which is taking Malawi, with all its literary artists, some time to overcome (O’ Ihonvbere 1997: 225).

¹⁴³Political poetry began to rise between 1992 and 1994. In such work the situation and experiences of the dictatorship were spoken of.

¹⁴⁴Oddly enough, perhaps, in May 1994 Banda was “peacefully defeated in the country’s first multi-party elections after having been in power since February 1963” (Forster 1994: 477). Thereafter, a small revival of confidence occurred when, in 1997, Dr. Hastings Banda died, supposedly age 101. With the tyrant no longer around calm seemed to descend upon the people of Malawi. Press freedom, for instance, increased significantly from 1997 with 20 different newspapers emerging, all of which engaged in the struggle for survival (O’ Ihonvbere 1997: 239).

¹⁴⁵So said Chimombo, speaking in 2007 (Lee, 2010).

With the above overview of Malawi in mind, and the culture of fear associated with writing under such oppressive circumstances, I now move to offer a portrait of the five named poets.

The Poets

The poets whose works constitute the primary content of this book are collectively Malawian writers. If only to reason the responsibility clearly denoted in their poetry of considering issues of the socio-political milieu of the time, together they belong to the second generation of modern poets in Africa. Interestingly, ideas about Malawi as home and exile have engaged each one's creativity. They have, however, all had different experiences in and of Malawi. Each illuminates and reflects differently upon circumstances in the given Malawian context; the poets have adopted different approaches stylistically in their poetry, as well as thematically.

Here, the poets are presented in alphabetical order of first names, merely to offer some structure in reading. Simply by virtue of the fact that more is known, can be accessed, or has been documented, on a couple of the poets, the content of the biographical notes vary. However, this section draws attention to similar information, and as extensively as possible, for each individual.

Felix Mnthali embraces chameleonic character and aptly epitomises the Poet of these times in Malawi.¹⁴⁶ That is to say

¹⁴⁶Landeg White imparts that “people who knew him at different times have different takes on him” but that when he knew Mnthali as a “colleague (1969-1972) at the University of Malawi, he was the token Malawian in the English Department and almost impossible to talk to, so

With the above overview of Malawi in mind, and the culture of fear associated with writing under such oppressive circumstances, I now move to offer a portrait of the five named poets.

The Poets

The poets whose works constitute the primary content of this book are collectively Malawian writers. If only to reason the responsibility clearly denoted in their poetry of considering issues of the socio-political milieu of the time, together they belong to the second generation of modern poets in Africa. Interestingly, ideas about Malawi as home and exile have engaged each one's creativity. They have, however, all had different experiences in and of Malawi. Each illuminates and reflects differently upon circumstances in the given Malawian context; the poets have adopted different approaches stylistically in their poetry, as well as thematically.

Here, the poets are presented in alphabetical order of first names, merely to offer some structure in reading. Simply by virtue of the fact that more is known, can be accessed, or has been documented, on a couple of the poets, the content of the biographical notes vary. However, this section draws attention to similar information, and as extensively as possible, for each individual.

Felix Mnthali embraces chameleonic character and aptly epitomises the Poet of these times in Malawi.¹⁴⁶ That is to say

¹⁴⁶Landeg White imparts that “people who knew him at different times have different takes on him” but that when he knew Mnthali as a “colleague (1969-1972) at the University of Malawi, he was the token Malawian in the English Department and almost impossible to talk to, so

With the above overview of Malawi in mind, and the culture of fear associated with writing under such oppressive circumstances, I now move to offer a portrait of the five named poets.

The Poets

The poets whose works constitute the primary content of this book are collectively Malawian writers. If only to reason the responsibility clearly denoted in their poetry of considering issues of the socio-political milieu of the time, together they belong to the second generation of modern poets in Africa. Interestingly, ideas about Malawi as home and exile have engaged each one's creativity. They have, however, all had different experiences in and of Malawi. Each illuminates and reflects differently upon circumstances in the given Malawian context; the poets have adopted different approaches stylistically in their poetry, as well as thematically.

Here, the poets are presented in alphabetical order of first names, merely to offer some structure in reading. Simply by virtue of the fact that more is known, can be accessed, or has been documented, on a couple of the poets, the content of the biographical notes vary. However, this section draws attention to similar information, and as extensively as possible, for each individual.

Felix Mnthali embraces chameleonic character and aptly epitomises the Poet of these times in Malawi.¹⁴⁶ That is to say

¹⁴⁶Landeg White imparts that “people who knew him at different times have different takes on him” but that when he knew Mnthali as a “colleague (1969-1972) at the University of Malawi, he was the token Malawian in the English Department and almost impossible to talk to, so

that information on Mnthali is rather modest and a biographical portrait is vague. Born in 1933, Mnthali is now 81 years old.¹⁴⁷ His family is from northern Malawi. It is implied that this detail influenced his detainment, along with other ‘northerners’ in 1976.¹⁴⁸ Mnthali spent his childhood in Malawi, before graduating from the National University of Lesotho and completing a PhD¹⁴⁹ in Canada. Although he joined the University of Malawi around 1969, his Professorship was short-lived due to his detainment by the Banda regime. This poet, novelist and playwright, spent a year or so in Nigeria before becoming Professor at the University

scared were all Malawians by the politics.... I could never get a political opinion out of him” (White: 29th July 2013).

¹⁴⁷There is an interesting video dedicated to Felix Mnthali on his 80th birthday on ‘YouTube’: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4D05bkM_9Aw. This reveals something of his life’s work, how people remember the Malawian poet and his academic achievements and involvements at the University of Malawi and the Writers’ Workshops.

¹⁴⁸‘Northerners’ were swept up in the denunciations of 1906 in Malawi. They were guilty of nothing other than being from the north, but the Presbyterian missions established there from the 1870s had made northerners the best educated Malawians, and the ones to corner the best jobs after independence (White: 29th July 2013). Mere association with a ‘northerner’ could land you in just as much trouble as Landeg White reveals in the following tale:

“One of these ‘northerners’ was my colleague Kirby Mwambetania, who taught in the university’s extra-mural department. He was neighbour to my late brother-in-law Frank Costley-White...When Kirby was detained, his wife was absent in Nairobi on a course, so Frank looked after the tiny children, bathing and feeding them, until Kirby’s wife could return. For this, Frank was himself detained in Zomba, for ‘sympathising with rebels’” (White: 29th July 2013). Particularly regards pages 343-345 also see *The Wrath of Napoléon* (2000) by Steve Chimombo. This is the context for understanding Felix Mnthali’s long silence about politics.

¹⁴⁹On Joseph Conrad.

of Botswana. In 2012 he retired from this position. Since becoming a political exile in 1976, Mnthali has not returned to his homeland: he “doesn’t appear to want to come back” home (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 34). The published works of this writer include *When Sunset Comes to Sapitwa* (1980). It is noteworthy that this book of poetry managed to slip past the Board of Censors under Banda:

It has also come to the notice of the Board of Censors that some copies of ‘When Sunset comes to Sapitwa’, another collection of poems by Professor Felix Mnthali, are in circulation in some schools and colleges. This book has not been censored by the Board. Those institutions which are in possession of copies of this collection should submit them to the Chief Censoring Officer for vetting as soon as possible

(Mapanje, in Peterson 1988: 106-107)

While the novel *My Dear Anniversary* (1992) is another of Mnthali’s works, he also appears in the anthology: *Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry* (1984).

Frank Chipasula consistently confronts the leadership of Banda in his writing: poetry, fiction and editing contributions.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps owing to the legacy of the overbearing establishment, Chipasula has remained in exile since 1973. Born in 1949, he first left the homeland for Zambia, where he continued his education at the University

¹⁵⁰From *Visions and Reflections* (1972) to *Nightwatcher, Nightsong* (1986) “one cannot but see the...critical stance of Chipasula” (Olaoluwa 2008: 9). In *Nightwatcher, Nightsong*, for example, “the confrontation with the leadership as the symbol of oppression that must be crushed is clearly articulated in the title poem” (Olaoluwa 2008: 9).

of Botswana. In 2012 he retired from this position. Since becoming a political exile in 1976, Mnthali has not returned to his homeland: he “doesn’t appear to want to come back” home (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 34). The published works of this writer include *When Sunset Comes to Sapitwa* (1980). It is noteworthy that this book of poetry managed to slip past the Board of Censors under Banda:

It has also come to the notice of the Board of Censors that some copies of ‘When Sunset comes to Sapitwa’, another collection of poems by Professor Felix Mnthali, are in circulation in some schools and colleges. This book has not been censored by the Board. Those institutions which are in possession of copies of this collection should submit them to the Chief Censoring Officer for vetting as soon as possible

(Mapanje, in Peterson 1988: 106-107)

While the novel *My Dear Anniversary* (1992) is another of Mnthali’s works, he also appears in the anthology: *Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry* (1984).

Frank Chipasula consistently confronts the leadership of Banda in his writing: poetry, fiction and editing contributions.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps owing to the legacy of the overbearing establishment, Chipasula has remained in exile since 1973. Born in 1949, he first left the homeland for Zambia, where he continued his education at the University

¹⁵⁰From *Visions and Reflections* (1972) to *Nightwatcher, Nightsong* (1986) “one cannot but see the...critical stance of Chipasula” (Olaoluwa 2008: 9). In *Nightwatcher, Nightsong*, for example, “the confrontation with the leadership as the symbol of oppression that must be crushed is clearly articulated in the title poem” (Olaoluwa 2008: 9).

of Zambia. He received his BA degree there before returning to Malawi to pursue work as a freelance broadcaster for Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. He subsequently opted out of the country, however, and by way of voluntary exile, he moved again to Zambia. Chipasula worked for a time in the neighbouring country as an editor, but by 1978 he was an exile in the U.S.A. “Easily Malawi’s most prolific poet”, he received an MA from Brown University and an MA from Yale, in Creative Writing and Afro-American Studies respectively, before completing his PhD at Brown in English Literature (Nazombe, in Collier 1992: 294). Among his collections are radio plays and fiction, and he has been an editor of works.¹⁵¹ His volumes of poetry include: *Visions and Reflections* (1972), *O Earth Wait for Me* (1984), *Nightwatcher*, *Nightsong* (1986), and *Whispers in the Wings* (1991). Chipasula won international recognition with honourable mention at the Noma Award in 1985 and with the BBC Poetry Prize in 1989. Previously lecturer at the University of Nebraska, in 2010 he was actively working at Southern Illinois University as Professor of African Studies.

Jack Mapanje is probably Malawi’s most well-known poet, largely due to his political poetry and activism under Banda. He first gained status in the early 1970s as a founding member of the Malawi Writers’ Group. Incarcerated for four years, between 1987 and 1991, in the country’s notorious Mikuyu prison, this poet, scholar, linguist, and editor was then subject of numerous international appeals. He has also acquired widespread acknowledgement through his prize-winning, including the Rotterdam Poetry International Award

¹⁵¹Such as *The Heinemann Book of African Women’s Poetry* (1995) with Stella Chipasula.

of Zambia. He received his BA degree there before returning to Malawi to pursue work as a freelance broadcaster for Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. He subsequently opted out of the country, however, and by way of voluntary exile, he moved again to Zambia. Chipasula worked for a time in the neighbouring country as an editor, but by 1978 he was an exile in the U.S.A. “Easily Malawi’s most prolific poet”, he received an MA from Brown University and an MA from Yale, in Creative Writing and Afro-American Studies respectively, before completing his PhD at Brown in English Literature (Nazombe, in Collier 1992: 294). Among his collections are radio plays and fiction, and he has been an editor of works.¹⁵¹ His volumes of poetry include: *Visions and Reflections* (1972), *O Earth Wait for Me* (1984), *Nightwatcher*, *Nightsong* (1986), and *Whispers in the Wings* (1991). Chipasula won international recognition with honourable mention at the Noma Award in 1985 and with the BBC Poetry Prize in 1989. Previously lecturer at the University of Nebraska, in 2010 he was actively working at Southern Illinois University as Professor of African Studies.

Jack Mapanje is probably Malawi’s most well-known poet, largely due to his political poetry and activism under Banda. He first gained status in the early 1970s as a founding member of the Malawi Writers’ Group. Incarcerated for four years, between 1987 and 1991, in the country’s notorious Mikuyu prison, this poet, scholar, linguist, and editor was then subject of numerous international appeals. He has also acquired widespread acknowledgement through his prize-winning, including the Rotterdam Poetry International Award

¹⁵¹Such as *The Heinemann Book of African Women’s Poetry* (1995) with Stella Chipasula.

in 1988, the 1990 PEN Freedom to Write *Award*, and the African Literature Association (USA) Fonlon-Nicholas Award in 2002. Currently, he is known as a strong human rights activist as a member of Amnesty, as well as PEN International. Born in Malawi in 1944, Mapanje studied locally for a diploma and his BA degree in Education at the University of Malawi before continuing to study for his MPhil in English and Education, at the Institute of Education in London, and for his PhD in Linguistics in 1983 from University College London. Mapanje was lecturer at the University of Malawi from 1975, but upon his return from England he rose to the position of Head of Department of English at Chancellor College, in Zomba. He maintained this title up until his detainment in 1987. Mapanje's work appears in various anthologies, and he has published five volumes of poetry. *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981) is one which seemed to specifically offend Banda's regime and is considered the reason behind Mapanje's arrest and subsequent status as 'political prisoner'.¹⁵² This work was followed by the publication of *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuuyu Prison* (1993), *Skippping without Ropes* (1998), *The Last of the Sweet Bananas: New and selected poems* (2004), and *Beasts of Nalunga* (2007). In addition to extensive academic papers,¹⁵³ Mapanje's most recent work is his memoir entitled *And Crocodiles are Hungry at Night* (2011). Since being released from prison in 1991 he has lived with his family in York;¹⁵⁴ and to date he is listed at the

¹⁵²Arguably more vocal, in political terms, to that of Mnthali, Mapanje might also be deemed a 'political exile'.

¹⁵³ See the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne's website: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ncla/people/profile/91107#tab_publications

¹⁵⁴In the United Kingdom.

University of Newcastle as senior lecturer of Creative Writing.

Lupenga Mphande was born in Thozza, in the northern region of Malawi, and attended Embangweni Presbyterian school. He read English and History at the University of Malawi, completed an MA in Linguistics at the University of Lancaster, and followed with a Doctorate at the University of Texas. In Malawi, Mphande worked as a literary critic for the Malawian Broadcasting Corporation for some time. This job was predictably notorious however, and so in 1984 he became an external exile by choice. He has been living in the USA ever since, working as Associate Professor of African Languages and Literatures at Ohio State University. Renowned for his poetry, he has won a number of prizes, including the 1998 Book-Prize of BBC Art, and the African Poetry Award. Along with being published in various journals, for example 'Poetry Review', 'West Africa' and 'Index of Censorship', he appears in several anthologies of poetry.¹⁵⁵ However, *Crackle at Midnight* (1998) is perhaps a most complete example of his poetry.

Steve Chimombo is close to Jack Mapanje in the recognition that he is one of Malawi's leading writers. Serving as editor and publisher of the arts magazine and literary press, 'WASI', director of Writers and Artists Services International in the country, and involving himself in the establishment of Malawi PEN and the Writers' Union (MAWU), Chimombo is regarded highly in the field of Malawian literature. Starting young¹⁵⁶ with his 1964 publication in the South African

¹⁵⁵Including *The Heinemann Book of African Poetry in English* (1990).

¹⁵⁶At the age of about 19.

University of Newcastle as senior lecturer of Creative Writing.

Lupenga Mphande was born in Thozza, in the northern region of Malawi, and attended Embangweni Presbyterian school. He read English and History at the University of Malawi, completed an MA in Linguistics at the University of Lancaster, and followed with a Doctorate at the University of Texas. In Malawi, Mphande worked as a literary critic for the Malawian Broadcasting Corporation for some time. This job was predictably notorious however, and so in 1984 he became an external exile by choice. He has been living in the USA ever since, working as Associate Professor of African Languages and Literatures at Ohio State University. Renowned for his poetry, he has won a number of prizes, including the 1998 Book-Prize of BBC Art, and the African Poetry Award. Along with being published in various journals, for example 'Poetry Review', 'West Africa' and 'Index of Censorship', he appears in several anthologies of poetry.¹⁵⁵ However, *Crackle at Midnight* (1998) is perhaps a most complete example of his poetry.

Steve Chimombo is close to Jack Mapanje in the recognition that he is one of Malawi's leading writers. Serving as editor and publisher of the arts magazine and literary press, 'WASI', director of Writers and Artists Services International in the country, and involving himself in the establishment of Malawi PEN and the Writers' Union (MAWU), Chimombo is regarded highly in the field of Malawian literature. Starting young¹⁵⁶ with his 1964 publication in the South African

¹⁵⁵Including *The Heinemann Book of African Poetry in English* (1990).

¹⁵⁶At the age of about 19.

University of Newcastle as senior lecturer of Creative Writing.

Lupenga Mphande was born in Thozza, in the northern region of Malawi, and attended Embangweni Presbyterian school. He read English and History at the University of Malawi, completed an MA in Linguistics at the University of Lancaster, and followed with a Doctorate at the University of Texas. In Malawi, Mphande worked as a literary critic for the Malawian Broadcasting Corporation for some time. This job was predictably notorious however, and so in 1984 he became an external exile by choice. He has been living in the USA ever since, working as Associate Professor of African Languages and Literatures at Ohio State University. Renowned for his poetry, he has won a number of prizes, including the 1998 Book-Prize of BBC Art, and the African Poetry Award. Along with being published in various journals, for example 'Poetry Review', 'West Africa' and 'Index of Censorship', he appears in several anthologies of poetry.¹⁵⁵ However, *Crackle at Midnight* (1998) is perhaps a most complete example of his poetry.

Steve Chimombo is close to Jack Mapanje in the recognition that he is one of Malawi's leading writers. Serving as editor and publisher of the arts magazine and literary press, 'WASI', director of Writers and Artists Services International in the country, and involving himself in the establishment of Malawi PEN and the Writers' Union (MAWU), Chimombo is regarded highly in the field of Malawian literature. Starting young¹⁵⁶ with his 1964 publication in the South African

¹⁵⁵Including *The Heinemann Book of African Poetry in English* (1990).

¹⁵⁶At the age of about 19.

‘African Parade’ Magazine,¹⁵⁷ he has written plays, short stories, criticism, poetry and novels. His most well-known work is *Napolo Poems* (1987)¹⁵⁸ which, in 1988, received honourable mention for the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. Earlier works include two plays: *The Rainmaker* (1978), and *Wachioni Ndani* (1983). Aside short stories,¹⁵⁹ numerous academic contributions and collections of essays,¹⁶⁰ several years ago this poet wrote a novel, *The Wrath of Napolo* (2000). Unlike the other poets, Chimombo was not a political or physical exile, nor was he imprisoned during Banda’s regime. While he followed postgraduate degrees abroad, at the University of Wales and the University of Colombia, respectively, Chimombo has remained in Malawi: he occupies the experience of ‘psychological-internal exile’. Born in 1945 in Zomba, he attended catholic secondary school there and completed his BA at the University of Malawi. Chimombo then taught at Chancellor College as Associate Professor in English “for close to three decades” (in Lee 2010: 33).

¹⁵⁷Cited in Lee (2010: 42).

¹⁵⁸This work has been revised. See *Napolo and the Python: selected Poetry* (1994); *Napolo and other poems* (2009).

¹⁵⁹For example: *The Basket Girl* (1990) and *The Hyena wears Darkness* (2006).

¹⁶⁰See Lee for reference (2010: 33).

Chapter 5

The Poetry: An Interpretation of a Selection of Poems by the Named Malawian Poets

Following the mapped biographies in Chapter IV, this chapter is concerned with assessing the poetry of each individual¹⁶¹ in a way that separates and collectively manages the experience of exile in order to arrive at an idea of 'home'.¹⁶² An understanding of a poem and its many aesthetics first requires an understanding of local culture and historiography, as offered in the context of Chapter IV. But, while home is unified by certain trends or correlations of kind, 'home' and 'exile' are not biographically static. Not only that, the case of each poet may vary in the sense that the experience of home and exile interact and co-exist simultaneously and express themselves differently in the different experiences. A person's social history, as a 'self', is paramount in the reading of a text as it will incorporate representations and ideologies of the particular consciousness in which it is centred and in which comprehension of being in the world takes place. In the quest to study the conundrum surrounding ideas about home, this is why I attend to each poet's poems independently: to reveal the possibility of thematic transformations of 'home' through exilic experiences. It is through varying poetics of disorder that

¹⁶¹The chapter pursues the poets just as they appeared in Chapter IV: alphabetically by first name.

¹⁶²Note the emphasis on *experience* of exile, again; rather than the place of exile.

comprehension of said representations and ideologies manifest in the case of these five Malawian poets.

If the biography in Chapter IV offers but a glimpse at the life of *Felix Mnthali* more can be fathomed as to the sensibilities of this poet through his texts. Significantly, while Mnthali is writing from a context of involuntary physical-external exile,¹⁶³ his poetry is steeped in memories of Malawi. He reflects on it as a rural place, an agrarian land. Consciously acknowledging the rurality of Malawi, Mnthali applies concrete images derived of features such as the fauna and flora of his country manifold in his poetry.¹⁶⁴ Trees, plants, crops, mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes are ubiquitously incorporated; out of the six poems dealt with here only one makes very little of the land.¹⁶⁵ Such imagery is employed in order to show sensitivity and receptiveness to the environment and to the physical aspects of Malawi as a land: as a home.

Mnthali notes the presence of an urban Malawi in several of his poems. “The Mlunguzi River on New Year’s Day” talks of two of the country’s cities:

¹⁶³It will be remembered that he was a political exile during the rule of Banda, and that he has never returned to his homeland.

¹⁶⁴While it is true of other forms of poetics in many more areas of the world, what Ojaide says of “modern African poetic aesthetics” and their unique possession of “a repertory of authentic African features” may be gleaned in the poetry of all these Malawian individuals (Ojaide, in Okunoye 2004: 772).

¹⁶⁵That is with regards the poem “The Mirage”. In this poem, Mnthali merely says: “There would be laughter in the heat of the desert” in relation to the physical land (1980: 102).

with chimney's that puff black smoke
in Blantyre and Lilongwe (Mnthali 1980: 44)¹⁶⁶

And, "The Reply from the City" speaks of "wars and rumors of war", and of hard-line rulers: "Ayatollahs, Shahs, Idi Amins" (68), associated with politics and centres of administration. But, urban reference is quite spare in comparison to Mnthali's abundant imagery of mountain fields and the sewn seams of the natural world. In "Napolo, the Landslide", Mnthali constructs a visual template of some of the country's particularly iconic, natural features, including both specific crops and landmarks:

We sum ourselves aboard Napolo's rocks
plant bougainvillaea
roses and jacarandas
sugar canes and bananas
in his sacred path

across Zomba Mountain
descending into Phalombe plain (28)

Mnthali's use of the natural features of the land in "The Mlunguzi River on New Year's Day" reveals the eagerness of this poet to recall and imbibe Malawi. Further, Mnthali recalls the way of life among people in Malawi through the depiction of particular crop yields, for example:

¹⁶⁶As a note for the general reading of this chapter: if a poet's poems are from the same collection, after the first citation of a poem extract (which will be as any other citation of text, for example: (Mnthali 1980: 29)), only the page number will appear in brackets. This is supported by the content in the Appendix.

and storage sheds bursting to the seams
with maize, beans, groundnuts
with rice, cotton, and tobacco (44)

And, through the use of the seasons, he illustrates the
land experienced as a dry place under a burning sun:

hoes swinging over a reluctant earth (44)
the scorching heat of October
never finds us breaking a stone-heated earth (45)

tangled gardens in December
or swampy rice fields in March (45)

Permeating most of his poems, what such evocative visual image further achieves is to confirm Mnthali's poetic eye. While it is enough to have art for art's sake, that is: to be poetic for a poem's sake, Mnthali's visual paintings, in fact, cast meaning, too. For example, if Mnthali's use of the Mlunguzi River speaks of its importance as a river alone, interestingly, it is also symbolic of other things. In "The Mlunguzi River on New Year's Day", the river is used as the particular natural feature to illustrate that, in contrast to himself, nature remains and flows through the land: the land he had to leave behind. Set against his experience of exile, then, the River signifies nature's undeniable and unmatched presence in Malawi. Conjuring images of consistency in the country, its behaviour and omnipresence is noted throughout the stanzas. For instance:

the Mlunguzi cascades
below mountain villas and summer cottages
through the sunless groves
behind academics' houses
to meander through the fields
of rich and poor alike (44-45)

Certainly a most prominent force in two of Mnthali's poems,¹⁶⁷ the Mlunguzi River is also characterized as having a temperamental disposition. Thus, the description of the River and the way it harbours schizoid manner, ambiguous and ever-changing, corresponds to the idea of a poetics of disorder in Malawian poetry. In the first instance, as the supply of water for thousands of people in the Municipality of Zomba, the River is a regenerative symbol;¹⁶⁸ a source of life: meandering through fields to feed those rich and those poor (see above). Its kindness is also evoked in the poem "The Reply from the City" as Mnthali celebrates the clarity of Mlunguzi's waters: "the clean waters of Mulunguzi" (69). Depicting water as fresh and fast Mnthali calls to mind an air of newness, of birth and sanity. Yet, simultaneously, the reader is told that Mlunguzi can be "fierce" and flow with "indifference" (45), its banks serving as a platform upon which back-breaking work occurs (44).

Certainly, the Mlunguzi symbolises voyage in Mnthali's poetry. Possessing the ability to manoeuvre through the

¹⁶⁷"The Mlunguzi River on New Year's Day" and, "The Reply from the City".

¹⁶⁸This is a universal sentiment: "the regenerative power of water, its ability to transform magically as well as to heal, is a belief lying deep in the human psyche, and its literary manifestations are universal" (Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985: 74). Schoffeleers and Roscoe (1985) example *The Tempest* by Shakespeare.

country, the idea is conjured that the River *sees* Malawi. It necessarily perceives what is inscribed in the country's social history in "The Mlunguzi River on New Year's Day", witnessing colonial legacies as it passes through Malawi:

in swirls of brandy, whiskey, soda
and gusts of imported perfumes
in discos, colonial mansions
and lakeside retreats (44)

It then observes the country's people and their customs. With the River as the subject, Mnthali depicts the presence of "academics" and their houses, mentions the "rich and poor", and cites "invisible masters" (44-45). From these depictions, the idea that the river is managing to see two worlds is fashioned. Like the poet himself, seeing one culture in Malawi and another away from his homeland, the River is depicted as experiencing two cultures; seeing two distinct strata of people on its journey. It simultaneously witnesses Europeanised culture and Malawian practices.

Another distinguished Malawian motif employed by Mnthali¹⁶⁹ is Zomba Plateau. Sitting atop Zomba Mountain, the plateau is a central landmark for people. As a land; as a nation, Malawi understands mountains and hills to be sacred sites largely due to the aspect of wilderness. This is what convinced many people that mountains could be the dwelling place of God and more importantly of their ancestral spirits. Significant sites are plentiful as mountainous terrain spreads itself north, south, east and west in Malawi: the southern Zomba and Mulanje mountains, for instance, or Nyika plateau in the north. While it is believed that God Chiuta lives

¹⁶⁹ Indeed, along with the other poets too.

high above the clouds, Kaphirintiwa¹⁷⁰ is the sacred site of creation on earth: “a flat-topped hill in the mountains of Dzalanyama” (Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985: 19), “it was agreed by all people¹⁷¹ that Kaphirintiwa was the land of the spirits” (Mnthali 1980: 41). ‘Mbona’, a guardian rain spirit, is believed to reside in the mountains. A deified chief, whose reign encompassed the southernmost lower Shire Valley of Malawi,¹⁷² Mbona is said to have died high in the cloud on the mountains, and that from “his wound sprang water”¹⁷³ (Welling, in Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985: 44). So, emblematic of myth, the importance of Zomba Plateau is implicit, and is shown as such in “The Mlunguzi River on New Year’s Day” as it is depicted as the spring of the life-giving River. It is also depicted as a “gargantuan beauty” and a guardian in “The Dreamer’s Manifesto” (97).

‘Napolo’, another mythical emblem, who, like Mbona, is related to mountains and escarpments,¹⁷⁴ is a spirit snake closely associated with threatening weather. For Mnthali, Napolo aids in setting a mood of weariness in the poem “Napolo, The Landslide”, and shows there is need to be vigilant of the “cataclysmic crack” and “hurling rocks” in Malawi (28-29). The significance made of the weather is interesting in view of retrospective thoughts that the snake metaphorically characterises Banda. It becomes clear that the snake-like Mlunguzi River and Napolo, both illustrated as

¹⁷⁰‘Kaphirintiwa’ means ‘soft rock’ (cited in Chimombo 1988: 107).

¹⁷¹ In a particular myth in Malawi: “Discovery of the Place of Creation” (Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985: 41-42).

¹⁷²Incorporating Zomba and Mulanje.

¹⁷³Hence his status as a rain spirit, and why various rain shrines are offered in his name, along with ceremonial creation dances such as the ‘Chopa’ dance (cited in Vail and White 1990: 40).

¹⁷⁴Such as Zomba plateau.

erratic, speak of the temperament of Malawi's nature as well as the feelings surrounding the socio-political situation in the country.

With regards to feelings in the country, the topographical feature Mnthali mentions in his poetry of a collection of trees is significant. While the poet does not refer to this feature as a 'forest', "the sunless groves" (44) in "The Mlunguzi River on New Year's Day" appear forest-like. This image reveals a fear "that forests evoke in Malawians" (Mthatiwa 2007: 57). In many Malawian imaginations the shade beneath trees is a space of the dark unknown and therefore "manifests power, natural and supernatural power, with its unlimited scope for mystery" (Obiechina, in Mthatiwa 2007: 57). As Mnthali describes the journey of the River, from Zomba Plateau downwards, he offers something of an amplifying fear in the way that Mlunguzi passes through these "sunless groves" "behind academics' houses" (44). This is clearly a poignant line regarding the era of Dr. Banda and the situation many 'academics',¹⁷⁵ like Mnthali, found themselves in: ultimately, living in fear.

Certainly, Mnthali's ability to draw on nature and manipulate such imagery to speak metaphorically is paramount. In doing so, he conjures reactions such as anger, loss, or peace in his poetry. Water, it seems to me, is employed as a central motive throughout Mnthali's work to convey cleanliness or delivery. For instance, newness is evoked in the image of the birthing canal in "Napolo, The Landslide", and talk of rivers flowing, clean and clear in "The Reply from the City" (68-69) implies calmness. In "The Dreamer's Manifesto" calm also descends. This might be conjured from the very title, in fact: "Dreamer" evokes

¹⁷⁵ And many more people.

contemplation. It also stands for aspiration versus delusion; something between reality and make-believe. In this sense, between one and the other, the reader experiences Mnthali's liminal being in exile. Portraying the landscapes the poet transverses, the poem wanders through both Western and African culture. The description of the "American flag... bearing viruses" juxtaposed with a following stanza in which Mnthali illustrates the beauty and protective nature of Zomba Mountain helps to capture the overall sense of a two-sided tale; a poetics of disorder is teased out.

Acquainted with the experience and feelings of the poet, here: displaced as an exile, betwixt and between two worlds and cultures, with pleasant memories of one, and living the reality of the other; the reader is consigned with a sense of empathy. "Prayer for a Butterfly" also offers a concentrate of emotion. Mnthali employs a creature which speaks of niceties and charm in this poem. But, if the butterfly conjures an image of intricate beauty and peaceful company, the moments it spends with you are known to be short-lived and fleeting; it is, then, a symbol of flight. It is clear that central to this poem is Mnthali's feeling towards exile and his never-ending experience of it. Simple words and sentiments, such as "abandoned", "no longer see", "into the unknown", "doomed to return to the desert" and, "ever and for ever" (108-109), speak of the poet's predicament away from his homeland. From the fashioning of charm the reader in turn empathizes with the poet's liminality. Sadness is evoked.

Effectively, a sense of perpetual movement is created, too:

dancing in the whirlwind
and perhaps to stumble

May this butterfly
go on flying

May this butterfly still dance (108-109)

The simple mention of “its wings and its colours” (108) adds to the creation of a photographic reality of the flickering nature of both the creature and the exilic experience in question. Mnthali clarifies for the reader that, while this butterfly might be betwixt and between the here and there, the now and then, it is also at home in the world. Using cosmological imagery, depicting the sun, the earth, and the universe, the poet shows that the butterfly, while not belonging to *one* place, still has a relationship with and belongs to some kind of space. This might be sampled from a number of points in the poem:

a butterfly
conversing with the sun

one with the dust
of the universe

are one
with the vapours of this earth

this butterfly
which exchanges laughter
and jokes with the sun (108-109)

Like the butterfly and the experience of exile, and indeed like that of home, “Prayer for a Butterfly” is transitory. Taken on a flight with the poet’s delicate creature, the reader moves, in a “dance”; a “trance” (108), through time and space with Mnthali, imagining a past: once speaking “in tongues” (108), and of an “unknown” future in which “to discover” (109).

Meanwhile, the “prayer” in the said poem suggests belief; having a substantial grasp of something fundamental; having hope. In contrast, the “butterfly” connotes something that is perhaps less containable. As Mnthali shows, the butterfly is ever-moving, perhaps like a memory then it must be captured lest it escapes: becomes a fugitive in the night. If, in this sense, the reader equates the butterfly as a symbol of memory, the poem becomes all the more emotionally charged; sadness is elevated as it seems to directly indicate the loss experienced in exile:

May this butterfly go on flying (108)

Neither the butterfly
nor my dream I know
can live on forever (109)

Saying that, the butterfly (memory) is certainly not portrayed by Mnthali as static, it is rather on “safari” (108), journeying and liminal. Memories are ever-created; through each place and each experience, new memories are made, and, so, the butterfly keeps “dancing in the whirlwind” (109). Such a topic carries to the poem “The Mirage”. While memory is anything but imbued with clarity, “The Mirage” depicts the puzzle of it absolutely. Through disorderly poetics, Mnthali

speaks of emotion most directly in this poem, elevating notions of loss and longing assigned to the exilic condition:

I longed to return

But I longed oh I longed

I crave for the beginning (102)

He also highlights the notion that with memory there is still some way to think of home and to create for one-self the beginning again. The poem achieves a fashioning of the sense of a “hope of reconstruction” (102), and offers that in exile one can obtain a heightened awareness of home. The reader glimpses at the poet’s experience of exile. An explosion is followed by a need to re-build and put the pieces back together.

While, in comparison to earlier poems, Mnthali moves away from the rural imagery of Malawi in “The Mirage” it is abundant with images of the earth; the universe, thus, further stipulating that home, while a physical landscape in one sense, is a place in the world. Insinuating a beginning of time, a beginning of the place of home, the poet speaks of “creation”, “cells”, “molecules”, and “atoms” (102). Images of “heaven”, “earth”, “dreams” and “shadows” (97-98), in the poem “The Dreamer’s Manifesto”, similarly brings to the reader’s notice the poet’s engagement with other-worldly experiences. It portrays a connection to the cosmos and elevates the sense of a mix of worlds. Talking of more than one space, Mnthali portrays a sense of belonging to an eminent realm at the same time as stating that one and all firmly belong to this world:

belong
not two worlds
or even three
but to the world (98)

Certainly in three of Mnthali's poems,¹⁷⁶ the reader gains insight into a pot of accumulated experience. Universal aspects are depicted. "The Dreamer's Manifesto" offers description of a culture outside of Malawi. Name dropping artists such as James Brown and Otis Redding (98), Mnthali speaks of American rhythms of life, which suggestively influence his life¹⁷⁷ upon contact. At the same time, this poem depicts life as it is lived in Malawi. The poet portrays the presence of youth in the country:

And now that the valleys
supporting Chancellor College that cradle of our
millennium
have sunk into the night before Creation
inviting us to fly as in the dreams of our youth (98)

Using the possessive pronoun 'our' Mnthali takes responsibility for the new generation in his country. By doing this, he is associating himself with lives lived at a present time in his homeland, despite his absence. Cultural practice is also woven into the poem. Mnthali alludes to two Malawian dances, "Ingoma" and "Chopa", illuminating present cultural way of life in the country. Both are very important dances in Malawi. While 'Ingoma' is mostly associated with the Ngoni

¹⁷⁶ "Prayer for a Butterfly", "The Mirage" and, "The Dreamer's Manifesto".

¹⁷⁷ And, by extension, other Malawians.

people of Mzimba and Mchinji Districts, in northern and central regions of the country respectively, it is closely related to the 'Ngoma' dance performed by those in the southern most regions, too.¹⁷⁸ Both men and women are heavily involved during the dance (sndp.org.mw). Then, originally Lomwe¹⁷⁹ and now popular in the southern region of Malawi,¹⁸⁰ the 'Chopa' is a dance of "great power and complex symbolism" (Vail and White 1990: 40). It functions to honour the ancestors and persuades them to send rain.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, the paramount meaning and symbolism of this dance emanates from the Lomwe creation myth "which tells how the first man and first woman came out of a cave in their Mozambique homeland and brought conflict to a harmonious world through their discovery of fire". This is played out through the dance's "oppositions of male to female, violence to gentleness, hunting to planting, dust to the rains" (Vail and White 1990: 40). Mnthali achieves collective identification by

¹⁷⁸'Ingoma' was "originally a war dance performed after a successful battle" (sndp.org.mw). The men are elaborately decorated; costumes are made of animal skins, headpieces made of feathers, ornaments are worn on limbs and beads are wrapped across the body and hung around the neck. While the men sing and stomp, waving spears, clubs or shields as though at war, the women, dressed from the waist down in one piece of cloth, called a 'Chilundu', a blouse and a headpiece called 'DUKU', clap, sing and ululate in unison forming lines around the men as they perform (sndp.org.mw).

¹⁷⁹The Lomwe were people who came to Malawi from the eastern part of Mozambique in the nineteenth century.

¹⁸⁰In districts such as Thyolo and Mulanje.

¹⁸¹Again men *and* women are involved. With a significant amount of drumming, the men make a procession around their chief during 'Chopa', again wielding spears and clubs, and, in this case, sometimes "with venomous snakes draped around their necks" (Vail and White 1990: 40). The women, waving green branches, dance in a circle on the outer edge of the procession.

depicting these dances. In the first instance, it gathers together men and women, then it assumes the poet a part of a family; a larger body of community knowledge, of something shared; it is essentially suggestive of his make-up as a human being. Further still, in citing dances which are ritualistically performed, Mnthali is effectively positioning himself in ancestral dealings. With similar respect to the elevation of sacred sites, such as Zomba Plateau, Mnthali fashions a Malawian sensibility here, and shows what it is that makes the country a home.

Dealing with men, women, youth and the ancestors, there is a firm sense of relationship in the poetry. Knowing what we know of the history and politics of Malawi, and the certain predicaments of these poets, the dedication Mnthali makes to Jack Mapanje with his poem “The Reply from the City” similarly speaks of brotherliness; togetherness; an association to a wider collective in view of experiences of home and exile.

“Talking of Sharp Things”, a poem by *Frank Chipasula*, is also offered in dedication. For Mapanje and Mphande, two poets who were residing in Malawi at the time, this poem is a message of comradeship and encouragement to those back home. The poem sets the tone for what is largely politically charged poetry by Chipasula. Crossing the border into Zambia in 1973, “just ahead of the Special Branch officers who wanted to question him about his poetry”,¹⁸² Chipasula became “an exile unable to return home” under Banda (Nazombe, in Collier 1992: 294). Like Mnthali,

¹⁸² Nazombe, however, adds that “the circumstances surrounding Frank Chipasula’s flight from Malawi have never been fully explained” (in Collier 1992: 294). The need for Chipasula to escape the country seemed to follow a brother’s arrest. But this is from but one source; there are various accounts.

Chipasula was an involuntary physical-external exile in the first instance. This poet inhabits another strand of physical-external exile as he also voluntarily left Malawi in later years. In both experiences, however, from Zambia and subsequently from within the U.S.A, Chipasula maintained that it was time for Malawians “to talk”¹⁸³ directly about the injustices of the regime and to change what he viewed as “playing safe” in literary works (Nazombe, in Collier 1992: 295). Perhaps as a result of his journalistic experience, in Malawi and Zambia, Chipasula positioned himself as a politically minded poet of the time. Throughout his poems, Chipasula questions the leadership back in Malawi and queries what any of the oppressive measures taken by the President achieved. For instance, in “A Love Poem for My Country”, Chipasula points at the paradox of “law and order” in the country, alluding to the terms as “terrible twins” (Chipasula 1991: 39). Supposedly meant to ensure good, laws in Malawi in fact resulted in danger; illustrated by Chipasula as “thick tunnel of barbed wire” (39). Similarly, the situation in the country whereby everything is obscured and driven by the dictatorship is shown in “Talking of Sharp Things”:

And spares no one, even those who do not talk

Of the strange wedge driven permanently between
people

(Chipasula 1984: 12)

¹⁸³Written in a letter to a colleague, the poet and social critic, Anthony Nazombe. Dated 13th November 1981 (cited in Collier 1992: 295).

Chipasula also speaks of Banda as blood-thirsty, wondering what the ruler hopes to gain from this style of dominance: “what thirst does this blood quench?” (11).

Certainly, such a poem sets an appropriate tone for much of Chipasula’s work. The experience of exile is clearly portrayed as harsh and painful. This is obvious in the image of cutting into a whole and vibrant “ripe mango” (11). The mango can be nothing other than a metaphor for the succulence and tenderness of home. With a “razor-sharp knife” the fruit is sliced; its sweetness ravaged (11). This poetic disorderliness is suggestive of the hurt displacement from home commands. While Nazombe suggests that the poet disregards personal problems in his poetry (in Collier 1992: 297), Chipasula deals directly and coherently with the wider experience of exile. Speaking of exile and the severing condition at large, the imagery employed by the poet is of anger, guilt and collective recollection of painful times. These emotions (offered respectively below) are exemplified quite clearly in the poem “A Love Poem for My Country”:

I have nothing to give you, but my anger
And the filaments of my hatred reach across the border.

And passively watched you, like a recklessly-driven car,
Hurrying to your crash while the driver leapt out.

And our hearts are thumping with pulses of desire or fear
And our dreams are charred chapters of your history.
(1991: 39)

Despair is fashioned through exclamation like
“Hallelujah!” (1984: 12), and the image of pain ensues in

“Talking of Sharp Things” by way of “blood”, “sorrows of flesh” (11), and with a picture of the poet’s face painted as follows:

mapped with bullet-holes, machete and knobkerrie
scarred, bleeding... (11)

Furthermore, a world of disorder is evoked in violent imagery of an attack on a female’s body. The suggestion in “Talking of Sharp Things” is rape of a motherland. Chipasula says wounds gape open (1984: 11), and:

Bleeding, how red the river waters,
Bleeding into the water-wells
where we all suckle at the distended breast. (11)

While the depiction of water, and the illustration of suckling and the breast, offers an image of a life-giving mother, “bleeding” and “distended” are juxtaposed to signify bereavement, a nasty swelling, oozing, draining of life. This is a horrific reality painted by Chipasula; poetics employed most poignantly to assert pain in the fullest sense. A mother, a motherland: a home, the poet’s home is being bled dry: cut out of life in his exilic experience. It is worth just citing another of Chipasula’s poems, despite not being fully managed in this book, as the female body comes up again. In “Water”, the “poet relates water directly to Malawi’s predicament” through connotations of “bereaved mothers” (in Collier 1992: 301). The use of water and blood running from hills and mountains, again, signifies the wounds of victims in Malawi (in Collier 1992).

A 'mother' in "Talking of Sharp Things", the personification of the land is taken further in "A Love Poem for My Country". Writing to the land as though it were living elevates the sense that it is more than a mere place. Then, in writing to it as though it were a lover, Chipasula extends the relationship he has with Malawi. Of course, this relationship or connection to the land is all the more imbued for Chipasula in his physical dislocation from it. Days absent from Malawi lose their purpose:

The days have lost their song and salt (1991: 40)

Moreover, the relationship Chipasula has with Malawi is largely alluded to in the handling of the land and its people in country-specific and knowledgeable terms. Inscribed with historic and cultural details, the poetry portrays an aesthetic which is clearly Malawian. For one, while written in English, he implants vernacular words at times, for example: "*phanga*"¹⁸⁴ (12), to speak most directly to Malawians and experiences of the country. He cites "praise songs" in "*Manifesto On Ars Poetica*" (1991: 108), and the poet's work is infused with the history of the land. In citing nationalist history and figures such as John Chilembwe,¹⁸⁵ in "Going Back Patiently" (1991: 38), along with historic political events like the Chilobwe¹⁸⁶ murders of the late 1960's and 1970's, in

¹⁸⁴From what I can decipher, in Chichewa "phanga" is a 'cave in rock'. See Jan Vermeullen's Chichewa – English dictionary (1979): http://www.fenza.org/docs/various/vermeullen_chewa_dictionary.pdf

¹⁸⁵A Malawian Baptist pastor in the 1900's, Chilembwe is regarded as a hero in the country.

¹⁸⁶Several violent murders occurred, between 1968 and 1970, in the Chilobwe Township in Blantyre. It was believed that the Government had inspired such attacks (cited in Nazombe, Collier 1992: 298).

“Talking of Sharp Things” (1984:13), Chipasula expresses his knowledge of, and relationship to, his country.

The poet then invites the reader to grieve with him for Malawi’s past in “Ritual Girl”. Speaking of a girl “drained of her dance” (9), scorching her hair to be as straight as bamboo cane, Chipasula, again, manages to evoke a sense of loss through poetics of disorder. It is a poem which displays the old age customs, ceremonial aspects, and basic rituals of life in Malawi. The ‘girl’ is symbolic of Chipasula’s homeland. He portrays her as “dragging heavy foot-chains”, and undergoing horrific changes which mean that, now, “she could pass for a roadside bar whore” (9). The land and all it encompasses, including crops, like “maize”, “millet”, and “rice”, “the snake-skinned banjo”, and its people: “the lips of the singers are heavy”, wail and groan for the ‘ritual girl’ (9-10). While relationship to a specific location, as well as to other people, is particularly central to ideas about fathoming home, an environment is easily effected by affecting people’s emotions in that place (Englund 1998: 1166). In turn the sadness evoked in Chipasula’s poetry speaks not only of his personal loss but of the loss of the collective in Malawi: land, people, and customs.

As is shown in his handling of exile and the examples so far, Chipasula effectively employs the work of memory in his poems. This further manifests in the poem “Because the Wind Remembers”. Perhaps like Mnthali’s depiction of Mlunguzi River as omnipresent, Chipasula’s use of the wind highlights a natural feature with ability to remain in place in Malawi: as opposed to himself. Additionally, the image of the wind remembering connotes that it was witness to the brutal regime in Malawi. And, too, to the experience Chipasula has been through: past and present. While it might be like the

River in one sense, unlike Mnthali's metaphor of the Mlunguzi the wind is in existence everywhere; it is a universal feature of the natural world. This, then, may allude to, and be symbolic of, the world's memory. Despite their mutual movements, neither he nor the wind is blind to the situation in the homeland. And then, neither is the world. In this, there is Chipasula's warning to Banda that his politics were not unnoticed.

As the wind is well-informed it can be associated with higher forms of being. The fact that it cannot be seen further projects its spirit-like demeanour. In turn, a sense of fear is raised in "Because the Wind Remembers". Below, the wind is clearly illustrated as something frightening:

in it are the howled exclamations
of bursting genitals squeezed
between blunt pincers in dark dungeons
and the huge teeth of the whip
biting into the flesh of our country
(in Maja-Pearce 1990: 173)

The image implied in the line: "The bird's deep whimper in the dense woods" (in Maja-Pearce 1990: 173) raises fear in the same sense as Mnthali's "sunless grove" did (Mnthalali 1980: 44). "Dense woods", like forests, are dark unfriendly places to Malawians. Chipasula also relates to the ancestors as he speaks of the wind as the unknown; mocking and "ghostly":

Ah, there goes again its raw ghostly
laughter like heavy guns thundering
(in Maja-Pearce 1990: 173)

Although feared in some sense, the wind's cry is also depicted as the people's cry. This correlates to what is known about the land and nature and beliefs surrounding ancestral place and belonging in Malawi; it speaks of the importance of the relationship to the ancestors as they are extension of the 'self':

Because the wind remembers
Because its thundering sobs are our own
(in Maja-Pearce 1990: 173)

While "Talking of Sharp Things" reveals the poet's feelings about the experience of exile, fundamentally equating it to putting life on hold in lines such as "like a child that waits to be born, but refuses to die" (1984: 13), in "Ritual Girl" Chipasula hints at how the relationship with home might be managed; perhaps restored and reconciled, and even re-created in literature. Poetry, Chipasula says, is a way of connecting again; an outlet for emotion:

Now our laments flow through every poem (1984: 9)

Poetry is the manifestation of this poet's invisible needle and thread. With such tools he sews the seams of home from an experience of exile:

But now let me turn to a needle and its invisible
thread and the tattered body of my country that waits to
be sewn (1984: 13)

Taking us full circle in relation to this poet's manner of being politically outspoken, in "*Manifesto On Ars Poetica*",

Chipasula also says poetry teases out truths about the situation in Malawi's socio-politics:

My poetry is exacting a confession
from me: I will not keep the truth
from my song and the heartstringed instrument (1991:
108)

The application and repetition of the statement "I will not..." in this poem emphasises Chipasula's defiance in speaking out about President Banda: "I will not clean the poem to impress the tyrant" (108). It is easy to understand, then, that, in being pushed from one's physical home, Chipasula rather finds home in his art.

An involuntary physical-internal exile in Malawi, such a sentiment can well be assumed of the famous Malawian poet *Jack Mapanje*. Incarcerated in 1987; with the cold, hard walls of Mikuyu prison masquerading as home, this individual sought to redeem a real home for him-self in poetry.¹⁸⁷

Mapanje may have all but departed from the physical home in his exilic experience, but it cannot be said that he parted with cultural knowledge and Malawian myth in his writing. In this sense, the poet remained very much at-home. The poem "If Chiuta¹⁸⁸ Were Man" is a prime example of how Mapanje remembers and reflects on his homeland; imbued with myth, the text, in turn, becomes Mapanje's home. Born in the context of both Mapanje's childhood, in which storytelling was first encountered, and from the poet's attendance at the first of the Writers' Workshop meetings,¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷Of course, Mapanje started writing long before his incarceration.

¹⁸⁸'God'.

¹⁸⁹At Soche Hill college, in 1969.

where creation myths were encouraged as sources of inspiration for budding artists (Mapanje, in Chimombo 1988: 106),¹⁹⁰ Mapanje fashions a sense of ‘self’ in “If Chiuta Were Man”. Meanwhile, like Chipasula, Jack Mapanje was a critic of Malawi’s political predicament under President Banda, and, likewise, this is shown in his poetry. What this shows is that, despite his physical absence, Mapanje remained engaged with home in more ways than one. It is clear that Mapanje succinctly uses tropes in his work: he relies on readers’ knowledge of a Malawian aesthetic as firm understanding can only be reached through the context of various myths. Despite the dis-placement of the experience of exile, expressed in various poetics of disorder, it would seem that the poet maintains some structure in the application of myths from home. By inscribing such collective homely aesthetics, home is all the more obtainable for this ‘self’.

It has been suggested that Mapanje’s intention was to adopt the style of the Malawian *Imbongi* (‘praise poet’) in his writing.¹⁹¹ Maintaining implicit poetic license, such a mask would have stood the poet in good stead to be one and both praise singer and critic at once: altogether evading punishment. But, as a modern poet, and, unlike the former poet and critic Frank Chipasula, remaining within Banda’s reach, Mapanje had to measure his explicitness.¹⁹² This manifests in his poetry. Shaping the poet’s persistent manipulation of disorderly poetics, in ways which are fervently metaphoric, Mapanje’s prison life pervades his

¹⁹⁰ Mapanje also taught oral literature for years in Malawi. Thus, Malawian myths were, and are, well known to him.

¹⁹¹ See Chirambo (2007).

¹⁹² To stress: while all the Malawian poets seem to, writers “operating from within the country had to resort to private and cryptic mode of expression” in their work (Mthathiwa 2009: 17).

writing. Owing to the political times, turmoil and messages of defiance are depicted in cryptic manner by this self-confessed chameleon¹⁹³ – “one is tempted like the chameleon to bask in one’s brilliant camouflage” (Mapanje, in Chimombo 1988: 102). At once, the poet and his poems are chameleonic in nature. Thus, while mythological matter and political circumstance is the content, metaphor is the tool with which Mapanje crafted a refuge in poetry. Indeed, when he entitled his first collection of poems *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981) Mapanje confessed to “being advisedly ‘cryptic’” (Mapanje, in Chimombo 1988: 102).

“If Chiuta Were Man” takes the form of an allegory: indirectly, like much of the poet’s work, it deals with Malawi’s dictator. It is, however, a poem about God conversing with humans and animals while the world is created. To further decode the poet’s inspiration; and to see what informed such illusiveness, it is of some necessity to look into the mythological context of the poem (Mapanje, in Chimombo 1988: 102). Basing the poem on a Malawian creation myth, Mapanje places the chameleon and the lizard as messengers of life and death.¹⁹⁴ “If Chiuta Were Man” is divided in to four separate sections. The first section describes a pair of humans – presumably the first couple on earth – and their journey to find ‘land’ in a sacred place: the place of creation:¹⁹⁵ “the promised Nsinja Forest” (1981: 7). The

¹⁹³ Mapanje has confessed to imitating the reptile. This has been suggested before, by Ngara (1990) and Chimombo (1988) for instance. The likeness of character is striking.

¹⁹⁴ See Appendix.

¹⁹⁵ As noted with regards Mnthali’s work, the place of creation, as referred to in creation myths, is Kaphirintiwa rock. Its meaning: ‘soft rock’ is highlighted in the title of Mapanje’s section “The Soft Landing” in the poem “If Chiuta Were Man” (Mapanje 1981: 7).

second describes the invention of fire, which leads to god and animals fleeing Nsinja. “Man on Chiuta’a Ascension”, the third section, tells of the human’s view and reaction to god’s withdrawal from earth, while the last section is about the remnants of the relationship between god and the humans after the event; “after the separation” (Chimombo 1988: 107). This fourth section, “So God Became a Chameleon”, is perhaps most ambiguous. It is the shortest, with two stanzas, and comprised of less descriptive language than that of the previous three sections. Poetically, it is disordered: cryptic in style, it is short and staccato in structure with just one or two word lines (10). Gleaned from section three, section four is a continuation of the humans’ commentary on god’s flight from earth: speaking of god as a chameleon in attempting to disguise his inadequacies by withdrawing from Nsinja. While this poem decisively depicts Malawian myth, thus highlighting Mapanje’s Malawian sense of being, the underlying criticism can be equated to Malawi’s socio-political situation after colonialism and at the turn of independence. The evaluation Mapanje has of God is inherently a critique of Banda. Allegorically, Banda is Chiuta.

Oral literary custom is perhaps the most apparent feature of Mapanje’s poetry that makes him so successful as a satirist. “Glory Be to Chingwe’s Hole”¹⁹⁶ is another poem marked with images of an oral aesthetic, and it particularly allows Mapanje to implant cynicism upon Banda’s politics. According to myth, Chingwe’s Hole is a hole on Zomba Plateau into which a Chiefs’ prisoners were thrown as punishment. As Mapanje depicts, they were often “devoured”

¹⁹⁶A poem in the third section, “Re-entering Chingwe’s Hole”, in *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981). It was probably written between 1975 and 1978 when Mapanje returned from London (Ngara 1990: 157).

(44), never to reappear. Perhaps simply due to the horrifying image this conjures,¹⁹⁷ Mapanje draws on this myth many times in his work. In “Glory Be to Chingwe’s Hole”, Mapanje fuses the said Malawian myth with another: Frog and Ebony Beauty. In this tale, Frog is said to have carved a beautiful woman to marry from the wood of a sacred ebony tree. By sticking a pin in the woman’s head, Frog turns her into a human. Removing the pin transforms her back into wood (cited in Mapanje 1981: 78).¹⁹⁸ The Chief who throws prisoners into Chingwe’s Hole, as Mapanje highlights in line one of this poem: “Chingwe’s hole, you devoured the Chief’s prisoners” (1981: 44), is associated with the Chief in the second myth. The Chief in the myth Frog and Ebony Beauty wishes to deprive Frog of a wife and so, despite Fly’s attempt at warning Frog, Mapanje shows that “when the Chief heard of a beauty betrothed to Frog”... “dogs... beat up the bushes to claim Ebony for the Chief” (44). Here, it is apparent that the poet, again, allegorically speaks of Banda’s regime. The chief: a metaphor for Banda; the “dogs”: his men.

There is a voyaging to be understood in these Malawian creation myths. Often, like any tale, there is a beginning, a middle, and something of an ending. Like the phenomenon of creation, the myth, or the real events of Mapanje’s life, the poem “If Chiuta Were Man” could also be thought of as journey in entirety. The beginning is a “landing”; starting from where things seem to “drift”, “glide” and flow naturally; despite some unnerving sense that hope is the “only hope”,

¹⁹⁷ It could otherwise be suggested that with the threat of imprisonment under Banda, and the subsequent reality for the poet, this myth came to signify more. Mapanje may have feared he would come to a similar fate. Certainly, the hole still presents “wide-ranging ramifications for people’s lives in Malawi” (Ngara 1990: 161).

¹⁹⁸ See Appendix for full tale.

life is “soft” (7). An event characterises the middle: a fire. It sparks a “sudden riot” causing corrosion and disruption (8). Accompanied by “belches” and “thuds” (8), what Mapanje imagines next is disgruntlement and anger. It is an “unquenchable fire” (8): an encounter indigestible: the experience of exile. The outcome is dismay, and dissatisfaction with Chiuta for deserting humans at such a time on the journey.

“If Chiuta Were Man” is not the only poem of Mapanje’s to fashion a journeying. The collection *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981) is divided into four parts, or chapters, and with each part the title alone evokes a sense of movement: “Of Chameleons and Gods”, “Sketches from London”, “Re-entering Chingwe’s Hole”, and “Assembling Another Voice”. The general illustration is of emplacement, uprooting and return. Each part elevates alternative perspectives from the respective positions and experiences. While we already know of the poet’s removal from Malawian society in 1987, and of his time studying abroad before returning and then subsequently leaving again for a life in York, a security of comings and goings and portrayals of home from in and out of the country are, thus, impressed in these poems.

“Re-entering Chingwe’s Hole” is particularly marked with images of return, and the poet’s impressions upon arriving back in his homeland having been in London. Home is depicted as having changed behind Mapanje’s back. “Glory Be to Chingwe’s Hole”, portrays such transformation:

Once poised for vermillion strawberries merely
Watched fellow squirrels bundled up in sacks (44)
And, then, repression and destruction:
You choked minstrel lovers with wild granadilla

Marrow still flows in murky Namitembo River below
you?

You strangled our details boasting your plush dishes
(44)

Moreover, in “Visiting Zomba Plateau”, the place of home: Zomba is depicted as a forgotten land. Zomba is, thus, “a microcosm of Malawi” (Ngara 1990: 160). The poet is embarrassed to find that the place in which he once worked at Chancellor College; in which the capital of Malawi was once located, is, upon his return, characterised by a lack of life. It is now a place “without the glow of charcoal” (42); the poet cringes at Malawi’s rivers, “without their hippos and crocs”, and at the mere “trickle” that flows (42). Mapanje says nature has lost its allure. Dragonflies “no longer fascinate and puff-adders have lost their puff” (42). And he asks where the “colours of home” have gone: “where is your creation myth?” (42). In this poem, Zomba is effectively depicted through the perspective of fresh, new eyes. It is with going away and returning that the poet obtains an ability to see Malawi as lifeless, as opposed to abundant and set against the nostalgic imagined idea of home: “once you have new eyes even the old sights, even your home, becomes something different” (Proust, in Lyer: 2013). Such detail is highlighted from line nine down, for instance he grieves:

Where is your charming hyena tail (42)

Although it was written a little later in Mapanje’s career,¹⁹⁹
around the mid- to late 1990’s, when he was adjusting and

¹⁹⁹ Along with other poems in the collection: *Skippping without Ropes* (1998).

settling into a life in the United Kingdom, “When the Watery Monsters ²⁰⁰ Argued” also alludes heavily to changes in Malawi: of home. Interestingly, Mapanje writes in the third person in this poem. Until the very last line, when he brings himself back into focus: “my struggle”, he refers to “he” throughout (1998: 73). This is noted with reference to the poet’s dedication to a number of other exiled artists. It is a collective experience he is depicting. But, it could also be interpreted as a personal, psychological displacement; the affect of exile and of not being able to think of home as it is too painful a memory. The first lines, for example, portray a memory of Malawi; a time removed from present reality yet imbued with personal experience: with ‘self’ experience, in a particular place:

When he revisited the Milimbo Lagoon of
His childhood he found it had rock-dried:
His dugout canoe, the driftwood, fish-traps (73)

Mapanje writes of fishing in the Milimbo lagoon and acknowledges the use of “fishing tackle and the worms for bait” (73). This elevates the notion that the poet himself has been and fished there: he knows of the “stubborn mudfish” and the “reed bushes” (73). The poet, thus, speaks of ‘self’ *and* collective experience, here. While personal to the poet, it is a shared memory among exiles: the feeling that home, and even the mudfish, has “moved on” (73). Moreover, the second stanza of “When the Watery Monsters Argued” displays something similar to “Visiting Zomba Plateau”: Mapanje depicts a “barren” land:

²⁰⁰ Water Monsters are used in oral literary texts in Malawi. See Schoffeleers and Roscoe (1985: 227).

Only ghosts, watery beasts, surged forward
From the reed bushes of their barren lagoon (73)

The poet pities Malawi's present situation and views it as empty without the active maintenance of memories and old age customary practices:

Today's without their yesterdays, he wept at
The blisters of their future without its present (73)

Despite the distance from the threat of Banda's politics, in terms of both space and time,²⁰¹ the poet maintains the use of metaphoric language in this poem. "When the Watery Monsters Argued" speaks of Banda and his men in indirect ways again, as well as simultaneously extending to metaphorically depict subsequent politicians in the country. For example:

He knew the silence their beastly transition²⁰²
Offered was neither victory nor antidote for
The wounds the watery freaks had inflicted (73)

Here, Mapanje criticises Malawi's political situation; he worries for the home his memory holds and says "do not ask us to forget the past..." (73).

While no less vigorous in employing cryptic language, in "Drinking the Water from its Source" Mapanje shows that freedom from Banda's clutches did affect writers' work:

²⁰¹Mapanje was living outside of Malawi when he produced this poem; and it was four years after Banda's downfall in 1994.

²⁰²With reference to the peaceful hand over by President Banda to President Muluzi.

“Distancing ourselves now our metaphors sharpen” (1981: 33). Written when Mapanje was a student in London, between 1972 and 1975, impressions of the place in which he resides clearly come across in the said poem. The “source” is a reference to the United Kingdom and its image as the place from which knowledge flows. Referring to many Malawians, as well as individuals from other British colonies, who received education in another country, Mapanje speaks critically of the naivety with which they studied there: “probably thinking of its purity” (33). A microcosmic Malawi, the Shire River is depicted here as abundant with wisdoms and knowledge. Yet, Mapanje says, people choose to look elsewhere to learn of its being:

The gliding Shire River mystifies us watering
Our golden lives, and tantalized we then conclude
The source of the waters must be more exotic (33)

At the end of the second stanza, the poet pleads for a return, or at least for some acknowledgement, of self-knowledge in Malawi:

We must turn back to the peripheral mosaics of home
Revealing the depth of their natural negatives (33)

“Peripheral mosaics of home” puts ‘home’ on the edges of reality, connoting a blurring of the old-age Malawian sense of home, and regarding it as kept only in vague memories now. Mapanje says that to return to the idea of home people must look to reveal its natural depths, and not to resort and mould to the imagination of some learned material acquired from another land.

A notable feature of Mapanje's work is his probing of nature,²⁰³ again revealing something of a Malawian aesthetic in his poetry. Already shown, landmarks and natural phenomenon²⁰⁴ are written of, while animals, like Chameleon and Frog, are also actively employed by the poet. While there are three ways of representing animals in literature: naturalistically, allegorically and compassionately (Soper, in Mthatiwa 2009: 19), by far the most utilised, and most often experienced in Mapanje's poetry, is the allegorical representation. The poet uses various creatures to speak closely of life contexts. They are manipulated in ways that comment on particular views of situations as each is associated with some emotion or meaning. For example, leeches, as bloodsucking creatures, are equated to filth and the dirty politics of Malawi: sucking life from its people. While leeches conjure thoughts of offensive swellings and bloated flesh, what such an application further achieves is a poetics of disorder. The imagery shines to elevate an essence of displacement. Then, the leopard, as a king,²⁰⁵ is used with regards 'Big Men'²⁰⁶ to talk of maliciousness and greed in the era of Banda.

Although they are generally ubiquitous in Malawi and in Malawi's oral traditions (Mthatiwa 2009: 16), birds, specifically, are representative of Mapanje's poetic voice. The poet also uses birds to regard other prisoners in Mikuyu Prison, as well as many more exiled Malawians under President Banda. In this fashion, birds are used as metaphors for victimhood and the suffering of harmless people in the

²⁰³As is seemingly becoming a recurrent feature among these poets.

²⁰⁴Such as the Shire River and Zomba Plateau.

²⁰⁵The leopard is often thought of as a king throughout Africa.

²⁰⁶A term used to connote elite men, and greed.

hands of oppressors.²⁰⁷ Such symbolic import of creatures is evident in the poem “Swallows for my son at seven”. The swallow, with its “brittle bones”, is a symbol of the prisoner in Mikuyu: vulnerable and wishing for freedom:

...wishing the chicks could just fly away, free (2009: 37)

While Mikuyu Prison is depicted as the swallows nesting ground, indicating that this place, in some ways, became a home for Mapanje and his fellow prisoners, the poet illustrates the unsavoury experience “in A-wing” (37).²⁰⁸ In falling out of the nest and to the ground, the swallows become the security guard’s meal. Further, in wishing to be released from prison, Mapanje’s use of birds is striking with regards the image evoked of flight, escape, and freedom. The depiction in the last lines of “Swallows for my son at seven” is particularly poignant as it describes that even those who can naturally fly away: the birds are unable to, hindered, and rendered detained: just like the prisoners. In fact, the poet’s use of the word “chick” arguably extends to relate to Malawi’s people at large. This can be suggested with some assertion regarding that “the allegorical persona of the chicken collectively represents ordinary Malawians” (Mthatiwa 2009: 14). Although the bird specifically used in this poem is the swallow more are used metaphorically by Mapanje; the wagtail, for instance, is an important one.²⁰⁹ To

²⁰⁷ See Mthatiwa (2009). Chickens, specifically, are “portrayed as harmless victims”, representing those “of Banda’s despotism” (2009: 15).

²⁰⁸ The “A-wing” was a section of Mikuyu prison. In the rafters of this ‘wing’ swallows would nest and breed.

²⁰⁹ See Mapanje’s collection: *The chattering wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (1993).

note, in oral literary texts the wagtail warns human beings of impending danger, and ultimately saves them from extinction.²¹⁰ This is, of course, significant in view of Mapanje's experience in prison; the fear experienced throughout Malawi, and the need for warning in relation to Banda's politics. Interestingly, and rather significantly, *The chattering wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (1993) was composed while Mapanje was imprisoned.

"Swallows for my son at seven" raises the idea that home is something of a relational phenomenon, and conjures that "for more and more of us, home has really less to do with a piece of soil, than, you could say, with a piece of soul" (Lyer: 2013). The poet speaks to his son: "When you pulled at my scruffy beard son", and relates to "tears on your mum's and sisters' cheeks" (37). In saying such things, Mapanje laments of relationships dear to him, indicating that memories of home are centrally familial. As Nyamnjoh theorises: home is "...attachment to different relationships... to people..." (Nyamnjoh: 29th July 2013). Writing, too, of his son growing up, referring to "milk-white teeth" (37), and of time moving on without him, Mapanje represents life in liminality. Similarly, the birds characterise the experience of limbo in their persistent taking flight; nesting and moving on, the birds therefore reveal the unsettled nature of exile.

In the case of *Lupenga Mphande* such unsettledness leads to an uneasy, saddened heart. From the experience of voluntary physical-external exile, Mphande wistfully recollects and expresses memories of home in his poetry. Despite the voluntariness of his exile, the sense is that this poet was pushed into exilic experience during the dictatorship. In the

²¹⁰See Appendix for the myth spoken of: "The Wagtail Saves Man from Extinction".

collection *Crackle at Midnight* (1998) nostalgic visions of home are revealed through fervent romanticised images. Mphande's love for Thozha (his home place in Malawi) is described in a number of poems in this collection for example. "Thozha View" is one of them. By using and repeating the simple words "I like" (1998: 24) Mphande portrays his love, and explicitly exposes the nostalgia he feels for Malawi. The remembered Thozha, that is: home, is depicted as bountiful and fresh in images such as "laced with springs" and "patchwork fields lush and green" (24). Moreover, an atmosphere of peace is projected. This highlights that for Mphande his home is somewhere which bestows calmness. The people and the land are then shown to live mutually side by side:

In season bee hunters swarm the hills,
yodel to honey-guides (24)

Depicting honey, and the act of gathering it, Mphande successfully portrays that the land, "the hills" (24), are a source of sweetness for those living in Thozha. A prime example of Sahlins (2013) theory, such mutuality of being is also shown in the poem "Visiting Friends" in which Mphande depicts eating "wild fruits while the cows graze" (56). This sense of one-ness with the land, and all imbued in it, is yet further elaborated in "Scanning for Rain". Importantly, in this poem, Mphande speaks to the spirits:

... 'You Leza, who is
Spirit, hear our prayer. We praise you the same way
As our forefathers: *Tomoka, Sambizga, NyaChunda*
praised

You... (49)

What this achieves is a fashioning of ancestral relations encompassed within the land. Told, in part, as though it was a prayer, and suggestive of libation to the ancestors believed to bring rain, it is here that the reader encounters ritual worship and customary practices of Malawi:

We slit the bird by the riverbank, tied its entrails
To the casque and threw them into eddies... (49)

In turn, we gain a sense of what it is to be at home for Malawians, and, while incorporating his past in talk of the ancestors, the sense that the land is sweet for Mphande is further given.

A particular point central to “Scanning for Rain” is that rain is life-giving. Without it “trees stooped bare, the sky remained purple blue” and “an eerie silence enveloped the village” (50). In “Thoza View”, “rain-washed hills” and the depiction of greenery: “shrouded in green canopies” and “along greenbanks” (24), emphasise the life-giving environment of Thoza. With “reeds flowering in white” (24) adding to its colouring, Thoza is depicted sensually, too: “Wafts of lilac fragrance” (24). All in all, revealing its beauty and abundance, Mphande elevates Thoza as heavenly. Several of his poems effectively show that there is no place like home. The sentiment is that Thoza is unique: “Only in Thoza” (24). It is apparent from the last stanza of “Returning to Thoza” that it is only in Thoza that this poet: persona: ‘self’ feels wholly at home:

Yet my body attains a certain rebirth
on these ridges where first toddled bare (60)

There is no doubt that the depicted home, impregnated with beauty, is set against Mphande's experience of living in the USA. It was here that he struggled with cold, harsh seasons and, ultimately, feared life in an alien place. The poet's unnerving time in the USA is clearly shown in the second stanza of "Thoza View" through poetics of disorder; in the chilling sentiments: "cool" and "cold"; in being unable to *see* people riding hyenas,²¹¹ only able to *bear* them in the dark (24). This conjures the blindness Mphande feels in a country and culture away from his own. Language of displacement, like "warped" (24), and notions of corruption among chiefs and the wrongdoings of "loose" (25) girls, also gives the sense of unease and confusion impressed on home from the experience of exile.

Characteristic of Mphande²¹² is the use of a dual processing -another poetic device employed to connote confusion. The poet describes physicality of place, for example, while simultaneously suggesting other meanings. The very last line of "Thoza View" is a fusion of ideas. Speaking of a "haze" over the land, Mphande intends for this to be read as fogginess, a natural weather condition. But, he also manipulates the "haze" to effectively speak of disorder, depicting that life in exile is a "haze" (25): disillusionment²¹³ from which one cannot fathom, or remember, home properly:

²¹¹An animal feared by Malawians. See Morris (2000).

²¹²As is characteristic of a few of the other poets too.

²¹³Again, poetics of disorder manifests.

One cannot see Thozha through the haze (25)

This notion is certainly predominant in “Returning to Thozha”, too (59). With his impermanent return to Thozha, Mphande shows he is like “a man sitting on the fence” (60). Merely worrying for the time he has to go back to America again, back to winter, he fears “aches of a cold touch” (60). The poet is essentially living a half-life, or, as he says, a life where things remain incomplete: “...in titles only” (60). As in “Visiting Friends”, the poet rather wishes for “one more time” (56). He wants to experience home as it was “once again”: to “sing again” (56). Written around 1994 when Mphande returned to visit Malawi, the poem “Returning to Thozha”, like “Thozha View”, depicts Thozha as energising, rich and magical:

It was a glorious morning
drenched in Spring sunlight, sun’s rays
turning dewdrops into diamonds among flowers
of lilies and poinsettia (59)

On the page this is a memoried place of home, idyllically set against the striking image of “concrete jungles” (59) and his silence in America. Opposed to the bleak season of winter, the poet locates spring in Malawi. This effectively symbolises the poet’s sense of a new lease of life upon his return. “Early morning” (59) paints the picture of a new day dawning, and further suggests clarity, while, simultaneously, the haziness of exile departs as Mphande watches “mist lift from brooks” (59). The poet plays with the return of sensory imagery in “chatter”, “clatter” and “the chirrup of children” (59). Language such as this is reminiscent of “Thozha View”,

conjuring tender images associated with noises of somewhere familiar, and, as he says himself, there is the “promise of happiness and joy” (59) to follow. Further, saying “we all have birthmarks” (59), Mphande speaks in terms which extend his experience to a wider collective.

While the poet effectively acknowledges that to be betwixt and between is a difficult experience to endure, his poetry promotes the need to exercise the act of remembering:

“it is not good for the old to linger out in the cold” (59)

What this highlights is that home should be kept warm and alive in memory. The past remains important. In fact, Mphande suggests there is a dependence on memory for the past home:

I depend now on this feeling (60)

“Thoza View” also points to the important home one finds in memory, and, by implicit extension, in creativity, that is: poetry. The poet says:

Only in Thoza, and only here can you bask
in so much sunshine (24)

Through writing “*here* you can bask” on the page (my emphasis), Mphande directly denotes that poetry is a kind of home. Poems are the created place in which to hold on to the “sunshine” (24): the memory, and to construct an abstract version of the physical reality of home.

In his work, Mphande cleverly extends this memory of place “from his own mind into the memory of the land” (in

Mthathiwa 2007: 61). As in “Thoza View”, with the portrayal of “the hills” (24) and the mutual being of the land and the people, the land is further personified by Mphande in “Princess of the Plateau”. Malawi is the “lady of the plateau”: the princess who sings to the wind (2). In saying so, the poet builds on the idea that the land is alive: the plateau “breathes” (3). Dressed in the colours of the country’s flag: “her shawl black, red, green undulating free” (2), the Princess, as Malawi, is illustrated as being protective: “shielding fish” (2). And, in describing her as a rain bearer, Mphande suggests a life-giving essence:

“Her voice crystallizing into rain as she knelt in supplication” (2)

The sentiment that the land is alive is also carried in “Visiting Friends” and in “The Fig Tree”. The line “songs of the season in echo to thrushes” (56) carves the sense that the land communicates, while “the tree wails” and its “leaves listen” (43) offers a firm sense that nature is mortal.

Following this, it is throughout his poetry that Mphande highlights that Malawians are “primarily attached to the soil” (Amanze 2002: 19). This is true of much of the continent in fact. Activities which take place among the “seeds, buds, flowers and fruits” of the earth are sacred and imbued with spiritual significance (Amanze 2002: 19). The Zimbabwean poet, novelist and essayist, Chenjerai Hove says “the land, actually... is a shrine; it’s a holy place” (Hove 2012). He explains that it is because ancestors are buried in the land, and that they are believed to give life, that the soil gives life:

They [the ancestors] are part of the soil, and we are part of the soil... so the land is very important: it's a spiritual force (Hove: 2012)

Certainly in “Visiting Friends” Mphande highlights such a notion. The land is portrayed as sacred relative. While grieving for two specific “childhood friends” (56), “Tichafa and Vuso” (57), the poet emphasises the importance of homage to wider collective “moulds” (56). He says he “will not be deterred” (57) from planting flowers and acknowledging the important upkeep of ancestral relationship. The import of respect given “to the trees, the river, the mountain, the hills” (Hove 2012) is reflected in Mphande’s poetry. While the natural features are “part of you”, the idea is that one has to:

behave in certain ways for you to be able to live harmoniously with the river, the birds and animals, with the mountains and the hills, and if you don't, if you disturb the balance, you disturb also your own soul, your own imagination, your own psychology and feelings. (Hove: 2012)

As such, it will be understood that to be removed from the physical burial ground of the ancestors is particularly damaging.²¹⁴ With the value of the land instilled, Mphande’s

²¹⁴Asked why it is important to remain geographically close to the ancestors; to where they are buried, Hove said “ancestors are not dead. They’ve only been transformed into another part of life... If you live near to where they are buried you’re going to be able to walk there to beg them, or request them to straighten up things. When you pour libation on the grave, you are requesting them to remember their responsibilities to the living, you are acknowledging that they are part of you, and you of

experience of home is absolute. This is yet reiterated in the assembly of mystical essence upon the land in “Princess of the Plateau”. Through depictions such as palm leaves fluttering “along the shore”, “silver-shafts flickering”, pristine “ivory white”, and “sparkling stars” (2), nature has a magical quality about it.

Malawi is colour to this poet.²¹⁵ In “Princess of the Plateau”, Malawi, as the Princess, is doused in bold shades, jewelled in “shimmers of her bead necklace”, “stooping is flower” and “edged by fragrant reeds” (2). While it is true that nature features in other Malawian poets’ work, the extent to which Mphande reflects on the country’s beauty and natural aspects in his poetry is unmatched: Mphande depicts “scenic beauty... not observable in the works of other Malawian poets” (Mthatiwa 2007: 54). The poet was born in the district of Mzimba which lies in the north of Malawi, and is characterised by lush highlands, rolling hills and valleys, and steep mountain ranges. The area has a much lower population density²¹⁶ than southern parts of the country and so, growing up, Mphande was immersed in the natural habitat. In this sense, it is easy to see why flora and fauna: trees, flowers, plants, creatures and the like are ubiquitous to his poetry.²¹⁷ Adrian Roscoe emphasizes this when he says:

them. When you move... away from there, it becomes very complicated, depressing...” (Hove 2012).

²¹⁵As in “Thoza View”.

²¹⁶See Mthatiwa (2007).

²¹⁷This is not only true of the select poems cited here: *A Crackle at Midnight* (1998) is teeming with sensuous imagery of nature. See “Cutting the Millet Stalks”; “A Tiny Lifespan”, which depicts the short life of a bee; or “Snapping of an Old Tree” (Mphande 1998, 20, 29. 31).

No one paints physical Malawi better than Mphande; no one is quite so sensitive to the scattered graces of its hills and waters
(Roscoe, in Mthatiwa 2007: 59).

In this it is emphasised that a biography shapes the manifestation of what it is to be home. Also emphasised is that weight can be given to individualistic emotions about the land as it is true that feelings for a place, and of a place, will affect the environ in which one lives, just as the environment will affect the way a person feels.²¹⁸ For someone so engaged with Malawi's environment, Mphande is bound to be affected by changes to its natural aesthetic; especially imposed change. Evoked in the poetics of "The Fig Tree", disruptive transformations of home reflect such sensibilities. The mark of modernisation in Malawi offers a particular example here, specifically regarding extensive programmes of tobacco farming²¹⁹ and other ecological processes involving the felling of trees.²²⁰ "The Fig Tree" expresses news of a council's decision to cut down a tree central to the village compound:

But now, I hear, times being as they are,
the council has voted to cut the tree down

²¹⁸As was referred to earlier. In interview, Harri Englund confessed that, although he had not previously thought of it, people's emotions (and, in the case of his "Death, Trauma and Ritual" (1998) article, distress) clearly impact on the physical land in Malawi (Englund: 25th May 2013)

²¹⁹"Up to 80% of Malawi's foreign exchange earnings come from tobacco" (Mthatiwa 2007: 63). While the farms are the backbone of the country, and the governments have all strongly supported the industry, studies have linked tobacco "production to deforestation" in Malawi (Mthatiwa 2007: 63). The clearance of forest areas is a big problem.

²²⁰Poems such as "The Lone Tree of Thoza" (Mphande 1998: 15) and "Snapping of an old Tree" (Mphande 1998: 31) further example the poet's awareness of tree felling in Malawi.

and barter the wood away to tobacco farmers (44)

While this tale tells of a particular event, a particular tree, what Mphande also fashions here is a more general highlighting of the import of trees.²²¹ The poem's four stanzas reveal the impact of the cutting down of the tree bit by bit. To elevate its status in the first instance the poet frames the fig tree in a halo-like image:

I watch the sky frame
the fig tree (43)

The fact that it stands as a centre piece in the village then denotes a significant presence among the people. And, while it fills the air with its scent, the tree's sound and movement again posits the idea that nature is living as one with the people:

Blossom fills the night air, leaves
flash, rustling, swaying
above my thatch (43)

The fig tree is a life in itself, but it also holds life and is a source of life. Shown by way of depicting it as a "brooding hen" (43) in stanza one, Mphande firstly crafts it as having a female status, before making the tree symbolically pregnant with ripe fruit. As a mother-figure, the fig tree is then the

²²¹It is true that the importance of trees extends outside of Malawi. See Wole Soyinka's poetry for further instances. Eldred Durosimi Jones says that Soyinka illustrates the prominence of trees in the culture of the Yoruba people in Nigeria, as well as highlighting their symbolic charge (Jones 1973: 6).

foothold for “mousebirds” and squirrels to live and thrive in its branches (43). The fact that fig trees have been credited with female embodiment in wider African literary texts further highlights its establishment and worth in the poem. This also speaks of Mphande’s relation to a collective kind: a continental kinship, even. In his short tale, “The Fig Tree”,²²² James Ngugi describes the fig as womb-like, “a place of sanctuary”, while further depicting its associations with fertility²²³ (cited in Cook 1965: 75); the Kenyan writer Joe Mutiga, meanwhile, cites the import of the fig tree in “To the Ceremonial Mugumo (Fig Tree)” (cited in Cook 1965: 132-133).²²⁴ As the above shows that the fig tree is clearly related to the term ‘sanctuary’, and that of motherhood, Mphande’s application of it means he directly conceptualises ‘home’ in his work.

Furthermore, as a tree’s worth is “judged by its use to humanity” in Malawi (Mthatiwa 2007: 55), Mphande’s denotation that the fig tree is core to village life is what is most striking in considering its eventual fate. As an evergreen, “in cold seasons” and “in the hot season” (43), the fig tree maintains precedence in the lives of the people all year round.

²²²Later called “Mugumo” in *Secret Lives and Other Stories* (1975: 2-8)

²²³Mukami is a barren woman. Ngugi says, “Her one object was to reach the fig-tree. It was a matter of life and death – a battle for life... She could feel a pleasant burning inside that made her womb dance”. “Her soul danced and her womb answered. And then she knew – knew that she was pregnant...” “...The fig-tree... stood, mute, huge and mysterious” (Ngugi, in Cook 1965: 75).

²²⁴Such significance is met with in European literature as well. D. H. Lawrence’s “The Fig Tree”, for instance, has embedded in it notions of Woman: “Floweringly naked in flesh, and giving off hues of life. There was a flower that flowered inward, womb-ward; Now there is a fruit like a ripe womb.” (Lawrence, cited in Cook 1965: 70).

Something I was witness to,²²⁵ and indeed made use of myself during my time in Maveya village on the tea estates of Mulanje Mountain,²²⁶ fig trees offer refuge from the heat of the sun. As Mphande says:

...the village council
holds its court in the tree shade (43)

In knowing the significant place elders hold in African societies at large, the line which states that “elders dispense weighty issues” (43) under the tree, further elevates its value. Reading this another way, Mphande demonstrates that felling the fig tree, and, by extension, all trees in Malawi, elders are being disregarded. Through this Mphande shows that with time his home is changing. In the poem, the people of the village know that the tree has “stood there rooted” for a long, long time. In fact:

...when the village was built
young people etched their names
in the tree bark... (43-44)

This evokes that the identity of the villagers, from generations past, are ingrained in the tree. Mphande says it is “a delight to the eye” (43); and in saying that it is “a monument to whoever planted it” (43), the poet shows that the fig tree is a living memory of those gone before, thus speaking of a relational connection to the ancestors. Certainly, there is a sense that it is frail, with “old leaves” (43); insinuating, too, that the tree is wise. Beyond their physical

²²⁵Mostly among teachers.

²²⁶In southern Malawi.

properties, Malawians attribute spiritual powers to trees.²²⁷ They are understood to bridge the worlds of the living and the dead. In fact, three worlds are connected: the roots of the tree are in the underworld, while its trunk resides on planet earth, and the foliage reaches to the divine realm (Amanze 2002: 41). A tree, then, symbolises “perpetual regeneration, victory over death... [it is] a symbol of immortality” (Amanze 2002: 41). Considering such customary knowledge, cutting down the fig tree and bartering its sacred wood for modern farming purposes is clearly paradoxical. Ultimately, magnifying the essence of a poetics of disorder, Mphande connotes the reign of death in this poem.

The death of custom in Malawi is nurtured by **Steve Chimombo** in his epic²²⁸ poetry.²²⁹ Such representation is

²²⁷Cited in Amanze (2002). Amanze’s work among the Chewa people of Malawi specifically denotes that the *njale* tree is symbolic of cosmic life and, as such, is used in ceremony (Amanze 2002: 41).

²²⁸In the sense that the poetry surpasses “the dimensions of reality” and represents the pole of history on the one hand and everyday reality on the other I agree with Mthathiwa when he cites Paul Merchant’s work, *The Epic* (1977), and suggests that Steve Chimombo’s work should be considered as epic (Mthathiwa 2011: 96).

²²⁹To note, the poems I make reference to appear in *Napolo and Other Poems* (2009). The devising of this collection has a long history, with various revisions, however. Featuring versions of “Napolo”, “Three Songs” and “Four Ways of Dying”, Chimombo published what formed the basis of the 2009 edition in the *Napolo Poems* (1987). In 1994, the poet then compiled the *Napolo Poems* (1987) together with his *Python! Python! Poems* (1992) to create *Napolo Poems and Python! Python!* Certainly, the original poem “Napolo” has been altered by Chimombo since its first publication in an issue of *Odi* in 1974, and its later appearance in the *Malabat Review* (cited in Nazombe 1983: 97). And, it is interesting to note that it was because of some “kinship and interrelatedness” in the poetry that Chimombo wanted to make apparent that the collections (particularly regarding *Napolo Poems* (1987) and *Python! Python!* (1992)) came to be combined (Chimombo, in Mthathiwa 2011: 97). While I stick to the poems

consistent with his position as social critic. Despite living in the home place for much of his career, and grappling with the ‘familiar’ in his poetry, the sense of estrangement is teased out by Chimombo. Being a writer means being an exile for Chimombo: a psychological-internal exile. Without leaving Malawi²³⁰ this poet visions and documents change in the country. Mutations of the familiar are profound.²³¹ An equivalent to the distorted ideologies of Gombrowicz’s Poland,²³² or the schizophrenic Zimbabwe experienced by Marechera, finds itself in Chimombo’s idea of Malawi as home, and this is duly reflected in a poetics of disorder.²³³ “Zomba Mountain” well examples this. In two halves, it speaks of fissures of time: time past, highlighted in the depiction of “Great grandfather” (2009: 94), and of time now, pursued by the grandfather’s inability to recognise Zomba Mountain in the present:

Now, great grandfather resurrected
would not recognize your visage (95)

The manifestation and expression of generations is a means of separating time to highlight change. But, it also importantly relates to a collectivity in Malawi and speaks of

in the 2009 edition, further documentation of the historic sequence to these texts can be found in Nazombe’s 1983 book.

²³⁰Aside from studying abroad.

²³¹There is consensus among scholars that Chimombo was influenced by the anxieties facing oral literature in Malawi with the onset of modernisation (Nazombe 1983; Mthatiwa 2011).

²³²Referred to earlier.

²³³Shown later, this is significantly illustrated by Chimombo in fragmented images of time and in stylistic manner; for example, in broken sentences.

the given relationship between people; of kinship; of an experience in history and to that which is maintained in memory. While the section “Metamorphosis”, in the poem “Napolo”, clearly indicates a mutation of sorts, “Napologia” and “The Sons of Napolo” manage the issue of generations, too (5-8): an elder advises a youth; “Son” and “Father” (6) are prominent entities; and questions are directed at heritage and generational legacies. “The Sons of Napolo” shows that in the current era youth dance “in worsted wool and crimplene” (7) while their shields are “emblazoned with a motto written in a foreign tongue” (8). While this regards modernism in its own right, relating to objects and materials such as “bottled water”, in visiting backpackers camp sites, and “concrete”, “steel pipes”, and “plastic” (95), in “Zomba Mountain”, Chimombo further depicts the onset of change. This highlights a takeover of nature. Onwards from stanza four, the changes to, and loss of, culture is emphasised. Mythical worth is smashed “to smithereens” and belief in spirits is “pulverized” (95): “Napolo no longer bursts banks”, and the mythical creature of Lizard vanishes (95). Images of “boulders” blasting on the Mountain, and scars on the “undergrowth”, also portray destruction of natural land in Malawi (95). The message is obviously one of ruin.

Cultural demise also manifests at the core of both “Four Ways of Dying” and “Three Songs”. In the latter poem, Chimombo grapples with the diminishing relationship between humankind and ancestral spirits, such as M’bona and Magadzi.²³⁴ The first of three sections, “The Wandering Spirit” portrays the disturbance of a spirit; suggestive of a person not properly laid to rest, this insinuates ill-management in terms of cultural practice. It may also point to

²³⁴M’bona’s mother.

the feeling Chimombo himself had of writing in a society where he technically belongs but feels alienated from. Repulsive images of dead bodies are illustrated in section two, “The Dead”, with “buzzing flies” and “worms and spiders”; decay is also painted in “mold” sprouting “on the worms breeding under the shrouds” (34), “rot” on “skeletons weeping”, and “the toilet at Mandevu’s grocery-and-bar” being “knee-deep” (35). To emphasise emptiness of culture in the final section, “The Living”, Chimombo depicts a void, a quietness:

In the aftermath of Mphambe’s thunder there was silence (35)

In “Four Ways of Dying”, Chimombo portrays the dying art of culture through the oral literary personalities of Crab, Chameleon, Mole, and Kalilombe²³⁵ and their separate attempts at survival. Describing the suffering of animals integral to oral literature, Chimombo presents the idea that culture is experiencing hardship in its efforts to avoid demise. Following the creatures’ idiosyncrasies, Chimombo shows how each tries to escape an imminent end: Crab crawls “sideways, backwards, forwards”, avoids, meanders, and squats (19). Crab’s nature is additionally inscribed by poetic form. The arrangement of the words on the page are scattered and disjointed; sentences are edgy and clipped.²³⁶ Chameleon then exploits its camouflage to hide away and snakes its “tongue out” to ward off danger (20); Mole, “wormlike”, burrows underground, fashioning “intricate passages and halls”, while Kalilombe, a creature symbolic of

²³⁵A larger species of chameleon.

²³⁶See Appendix.

sacrifice,²³⁷ flings herself at confrontation and dies on Kaphirintiwa rock (20-21). Such imagery illuminates a sense of uneasiness in Malawi: the place of home.

Chimombo's employment of animals is significant. In fact, the use of animals in Malawian poetry aids poets' conceptualisation of "belonging to the cosmos", as well as revealing a poet's sensibility to the land (Mthatiwa 2011: 1).²³⁸ I would like to suggest that such ideas open windows through which to appreciate the interconnectedness of human-nature relationships, and, once again, point to the existence of a mutuality of being. Certainly, "humans and ...animals in Malawi have co-existed and the relationship between humans and animals has always been one that is complex, intimate and multi-faceted" (Morris 2000: 34). In fact, "Malawians have a dynamic conception of being", which includes the active participation of animals (*nyama*), birds (*mbalame*), snakes (*njoka*), trees (s. *mtengo*), and landscapes, such as mountains, as well as ancestral spirits (*mizimu*). There are aspects of the world that have life (*moyo*), for instance, and those without life (*zinthu zopandamoyo*) (Morris 2008: 257).²³⁹ Furthermore, "no animal, plant, bird or insect" which co-inhabits the land humans occupy "is inscripted (or even encrypted) without aesthetic or iconic import" (Wylie, in Mthatiwa 2011: 140). Being attentive to animals in poetry at once exposes their symbolic significance at the same time as revealing a poets' attitudes to animals, to nature, and therefore, by indelible

²³⁷Nazombe considers that Kalilombe represents the individual in Malawian society who is "infused with millenarian ideas"; he equates the creature to the figure of John Chilembwe, whose revolutionary nature was early referred to in this chapter (Nazombe 1983: 121).

²³⁸See also Morris's chapter on "The Powers of Nature" (2008).

²³⁹Such ideas may be taken even further with thorough comprehension of linguistics (Morris 2000; 2000; 2008).

association, to home. Chimombo's use of Kalilombe is important in many respects. Not only is she epitomised as a martyr but she also represents a mother-figure.²⁴⁰ This is explicit in her being pregnant and "restless with impatient foetuses" (20), and in that she willingly takes her own life for a new generation, which can be fathomed from her climbing the sacred *nsolo* tree under which Yao and Lomwe people offer sacrifice to the ancestors (cited in Mthatiwa 2011: 128). Kalilombe, therefore, becomes sacrifice. Just as the fig tree was to Mphande so Kalilombe is to Chimombo: a giver of life. Furthermore, Kalilombe (specifically in "The Artists Cenotaph") is used as an analogy for the poet himself:

I wear the garments of the *kalilombe*,
don the camouflage of her lineaments (114)

While not alone in management of it, the character of the chameleon plays an important role in Chimombo's poetry. This may be particularly so due to the connection to, and its direct offering of insight into, Malawi's oral mythology. The line: "The Chameleon stopped to consider... and hesitated" (3), in the poem "Napolo", characterises attributes awarded to the chameleon in the creation myth.²⁴¹ Belief in the creature letting humankind down is imprinted on people's minds. For such slowness, communities of Chewa and Sena people despise the chameleon and will try to "kill it by stuffing tobacco into its mouth" (Van Breugel 2001: 37); mud is commonly used where tobacco is not found (Kanuka: 16th September 2010). Imbued by understandings of oral literature, then, although it is sometimes kept as a pet, the

²⁴⁰Accepted among scholars (Magalasi 2000; Mthatiwa 2011).

²⁴¹See full version in Appendix.

chameleon is generally regarded as crafty and cunning, as is shown by Chimombo:

I'll match my colours with yours (19)

And:

tread warily past your nightmares (20)

There is something improbable, impossible even, suggested in changing colour (line 19: as shown above). Yet, through this, the poet elevates the notion that artists, as chameleons, will strive to render their situation workable.

Myth, in fact, is comprehensively dealt with by Chimombo throughout his poetry.²⁴² Four main myths are managed by Chimombo: “(i) the myth of Napolo,²⁴³ (ii) of the legend M’bona, (iii) the creation myth of Kaphirintiwa, and (iv) the chameleon and lizard story about the origin of death” (Nazombe 1983: 84). The poem “Three Songs” alludes to the myth of creation and origin of death, for instance:

What god, tell me,
would say LET NOT MEN DIE
and give the message to the chameleon?

What god, tell me,

²⁴² It cannot be forgotten that Chimombo taught oral literature at Chancellor College in Malawi. His sensibilities were, and are, aligned to such fields of knowledge.

²⁴³ Although encountered before now in this book (for example, Mnthali’s “Napolo, the Landslide”), the myth of Napolo, arguably Chimombo’s favourite, is drawn upon in detail in this poet’s work. And, not only in the poems here: see Chimombo (1987; 2009).

would say LET MEN DIE
and give the message to the lizard? (33)

Similarly, in “Four Ways of Dying” creatures associated with creation and Kaphirintiwa rock (20) are spoken of. Such usage of myth speaks contextually of home, for it takes comprehension of a deeper Malawian aesthetic, that is: oral literary knowledge, to understand meaning in much of this poet’s work. The maintenance of linguistic knowledge is made issue of by Chimombo in his poetry. In “Three Songs”, for instance, the poet clearly speaks to Malawians; it is essential to know Chichewa to decipher the poet’s full meaning (35-36). Chimombo might have ideas about home but, in addition to linguistic comprehension, in order to communicate those ideas successfully, a kind of social agreement about home must already stand fast. Meaning is embedded in personal and collective ideas about home, then. Roscoe and Msiska (1992) say that Chimombo employs the elements of oral texts, such as symbolic import and structure, in order “to create poetry that arises from and illuminates his own condition as well as that of his society” (cited in Mthathiwa 2011: 98). Nazombe also suggests that in general “Chimombo’s poetry is distinguished by the writer’s constant resort to Malawian myth” (Nazombe 1983: 81). He says that this stands “as a means of interpreting personal and collective experience in the present” Malawi (Nazombe 1983: 81). Such is revealed in the poem “Napolo”. In the opening of “Napolo”, Chimombo warns his country of an encounter with the feared mythical snake. He writes:

Mphirimo! mphirimo! mphirimo!
Kudzabwera Napolo!

Look, up there in the hills! Beware! Napolo is coming!
(Chimombo 2009: 1)

Such an announcement, made to all, is a collective grouping of Malawians. By sending “Mulanje, Zomba and Nyika” (1) fleeing, Chimombo names together spatially divided landscapes, too, thus conveying connectivity in the country: north and south. In “The Artists’ Cenotaph”, too, the grouping of separate spatialities: of “the mighty massif of Mulanje peak, the granite face of Zomba plateau, the undulating flanks of the Nyika” (114) represents a bringing together of the people of Malawi. Also, “shrines of the north”, “Msinja in the centre”; “Ndione in the south” (116).

‘Napolo’²⁴⁴ is regarded by Malawians as the cryptic serpent that lives underwater or hidden below mountains and is the cause of devastating landslides and flooding. It is significant that Napolo is a snake. In Malawi, the snake, while considered dangerous, is a focal character, in life and lore. They are generally “ritually important” (Morris 2000: 145). Species such as the puff adder or python, which Mbona is attributed as being, are associated with spirits. There is a clear distinction between “Napolo and these snakes” (Morris 2000: 211), however. That is that offerings are not given to Napolo, despite the serpent’s rainmaking connotation. But, Napolo boasts two sides: “the purely mythical and the historical” (Nazombe 1983: 84). While lending credibility to the myth for Malawians, the use of lore is mainly in relation to a particular historical event in the shape of a “rainstorm which struck Zomba on the 13th and 14th of December 1946, causing serious landslides on Zomba Mountain and sending floods,

²⁴⁴ As seen earlier in this book, in Mnthali’s poem: “Napolo the Landslide”.

carrying boulders and large trees with them...” (Nazombe 1983: 84).²⁴⁵ Since 1946, Napolo has struck again,²⁴⁶ and the effect on people’s lives is still felt and experienced in the present day. Thus, in dealing with a topic in which many experienced homelessness, Chimombo effectively relates to a collective. The personal import of Napolo to Chimombo can meanwhile be gleaned from the fact that he grew up in Zomba. Born just a year after the catastrophe, the poet obtained details of Napolo as a child listening to his parent’s stories by the fireside. A broadening of his understanding and interest in Napolo followed in the engagement Chimombo had with his Father and the research he did as a meteorologist in Malawi:

I first heard... [about Napolo] from my father when we were walking in the garden, in our village, and saw cracks in the earth... he knew and told me about Napolo from a scientific standpoint
(Chimombo: 30th January 2011)

Chimombo asserts that, while people take meaning from it, “*Napolo* is just the traditional vernacular name given to flash floods, a geophysical phenomenon” (Chimombo: 30th January 2011). However, Chimombo does say that myth and

²⁴⁵The M.V. Vipya tragedy (written about by Chimombo in *The Wrath of Napolo* (2000) for instance) was in fact the very first relevant event in record that remembers the destruction Napolo brought to Malawi. The M.V. Vipya was a “twin-screw 400-hundred ton diesel ship” that sunk on the 31st of July 1946, during her fourth trip up Lake Malawi having met abnormally high speed winds and waves of around “15 feet deep” (Chimombo 2009: 15). It took approximately 200 bodies with it to the depths of the Lake (Chimombo 2009: 15).

²⁴⁶Villages of people, in Michesi, a hill in Phalombe District, were swept away with huge rocks and uprooted trees in flood water as recently as 1991 (cited in Mthathiwa 2011: 99).

history gives him “a rich background” from which to draw upon in his writings (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 44). I gathered the import of climbing the Mountain and its influence on Chimombo during conversations with him, but the section entitled “The Path” textually illustrates personal aspects of experiencing home depicted in the journey up Zomba Mountain:

I washed my feet in the waters of Mulungusi
and anointed myself with the blood
of those Napolo left unburied.
I tied the loincloth around me in a tight knot:
it was a perilous climb up Kaphirintiwa (2)

Regarding the collective again, in search of the meaning behind the phenomenon of Napolo, Chimombo highlights society’s management of the destructive force which rendered many homeless in Zomba:

And did Napolo pass here indeed?
Was all that for this?
This ritual of bloodletting? (2)

Even further this has been probed as relating to a universal collective; as “a *universal* search for the meaning of human destiny” (my emphasis, Msiska, in Mthathiwa 2011: 114). This can be said in relation to the poet’s use of the creation and death myths in the sections “The Messengers” and “The Message”, and with specific regards to lines such as:

I will to the mountain top
and there divine the message (2)

Here, the poet is identified as messenger to the public. This is significant in terms of relating to the Banda era, and in situations whereby the poet is identified as spokesperson. But, it also particularly regards 'home' as an existential, ephemeral place, and perhaps more rooted in an unboundaried space of divinity.

It goes without saying that the literary potential of Napolo is enormous. Chimombo uses Napolo metaphorically. Disguised as destructive weather, Chimombo utilises Napolo to document and criticise the violence of Banda's regime,²⁴⁷ for instance. Identified universally, the weather is firstly used in ways which simply relate to it as natural force: depicting conditions of sunshine, rain or lightning for example. This, of course, enhances the mood of a text. Then, simultaneously, it is used to represent imposing and uncontrollable change and circumstance. While the weather is something we all experience, Chimombo manipulates it to illustrate the violent impact it has on specific landmarks in Malawi in order to emplace the generality of it. So, in fact, Napolo stands as particularly useful in speaking of the poetics of disorder claimed of this poet, too. An embarking "apocalypse" hits the country and so the Shire River floods and curls round to bite its own tail, Songwe explodes, the earth groans, trees are "uprooted", and the river banks collapse (1). "The trembling earth", "the roaring waters", and "the hurtling mountains" (2) further offer the reader a sensory disorderliness in this poem.

While depiction of violent weather in "Napolo" emphasises an attack on the land, the last stanza of the poem

²⁴⁷While Chimombo states: "essentially I am not a political writer", he agrees that one cannot but "react to things that are happening... at certain times" (Chimombo, in Lee 2010: 38).

“Zomba Mountain” stresses the resilience of nature and the landscape:

Still, the cliffs cleave the skies,
split the sunset into shafts
of red, orange, purple, and blue (95)

The line: “blanketing the town and villages below”, illustrates the relationship between land and people. While humankind plays at transforming its environment in this poem, nature persists as a consistent entity: this, Chimombo says, the Mountain “will never surrender to man” (96).

Further still, integral to the ancestors and embedded in historical oral culture, the land persists at being remembered despite the seeming forgetfulness of humans. As “oral memory has a close mnemonic relationship with place and location”, so values endure by the mere presence of the land (Hofmeyr, in Magalasi 2000: 86). By virtue of this, Chimombo says that the natural state and being of Zomba Mountain is sustained: “This my great grandfather would recognise” (96). By utilising geographical features and interrogating Malawian myth, this poet imprints custom for keepsake, painting a memory of Malawi’s old age aesthetic on to the page.

At once, the violence of weather and the resilience of nature serve as literary image and relevantly relate to the exilic condition in which this poet lived during the Banda regime, and, perhaps, still lives having obtained a position of ‘other’ in Malawian society. Death and destruction, managed in various ways and for various purposes, enplace Chimombo’s internal torment in the literary texts. Chimombo’s psychological exile manifests strongly in harsh imagery

portraying the silencing artists went through in Malawi. In “Three Songs”, for instance, the poet denotes “scorched... telephone wires” and “breathless mouths” (5). Chimombo pleads for words to keep stories and knowledge alive where all else seems to be failing:

Words:

tell me what we did in the year of the locusts.
I can't remember (35)

Meanwhile, if the pounding of artists' senses are demonstrated in “A Word on Poetry”: “a yelp of pain a snarl of anger a squirm of uneasiness” (147), Chimombo starkly relates to artistry: poetry as being a “refuge” (36). Words are Chimombo's metaphoric hoe with which he digs himself a “sanctuary” (36). The poetic form in “A Word on Poetry” shows the comfort Chimombo has in literary endeavour; sprawling and spaced out, the poet is able to spread himself across the page (147). Despite Banda's oppression there is a safety in the text. While Chimombo's use of the sacrificial character of Kalilombe, in “Four Ways of Dying”, holds relevance in terms of representing rebirth,²⁴⁸ the poet further paints a picture of rebirth and rejuvenation in “A Word on Poetry”; saying that “poetry invigorates”, probes, oils, and tantalizes showing that literary endeavour is active rather than passive (147). Thus, in exile a rebirth can be fashioned in poetry. A sense of self is re-gained. Chimombo says, although intense: “galvanizing nerve endings to a quivering mass of anticipation”, poetry invites “tactile exploration” in a situation where “other senses” are rendered bound (147). This is said

²⁴⁸See Mthathiwa (2011)

with evident reference to artists' exile, and their resort to metaphor as a way of avoiding political integration in Malawi.

Elevating the notion of internal-psychological exile, Chimombo visions home from within the country yet experiences the periphery. Effectively, through poetics of disorder, manifesting in distraught images of Malawi's landscape and culture, the exilic experience is overtly represented in Chimombo's work. Far from a rejection of Malawi,²⁴⁹ however, Chimombo works closely with the 'self' to creatively fathom collective notions of home in his poetry. One only has to turn to the poem "The Artists' Cenotaph" to pursue such an idea. Firstly, if all that has been said about landscape stands fast then the mountains Chimombo arms himself with, in line one of this poem, fittingly connote negotiation of home from the onset. The significance that this is written in text means that home is etched to the page. Cleaning himself, "soul and body", "with the waters of the Shire and Ruw" (114) – rivers associated spiritually and representative symbols of Malawi- elevates the idea that this poet obtains clarity, and feels purified, in pursuit of home: that is, significantly, pursuit of home *through* and *in* poetry. While such striving is distinctly personal, the sense of collectivity is simultaneously apparent. "For one, the "cenotaph" spoken of is a monument to the memory of many artists in Malawi. Comradeship is marked out in the naming of "candidates", for instance: "Chiromo" "Chiwalo", and "Chisiza Jr"; and, too, "kindred spirits" represents a shared experience (115-116). The ultimate statement imprinted by Chimombo in this poem is particularly poignant. And, that is not only in terms of his own work but

²⁴⁹This might be claimed on the terms of rebuking his social milieu.

with view to the other four poets identified in this book. He ends:

WE ARE NOT DEAD! OUR WORKS LIVE ON!
(117)

Inscribed here is the message that by way of pursuing their “work” (117), that is: their poetry, home flourishes for these Malawian exiles.

The task in this chapter has essentially been that of demonstrating how the experience of exile effects transformations of ‘home’ as expressed through the eyes of five Malawian poets. It seems that, arising from the different exilic experiences, home is readily negotiated through particular poetics of disorder.

It is important that such ‘poetics of disorder’ are punctuated by aesthetic differences, which are of course signature of the poet, or each ‘self’, involved. For example, Mapanje’s conscious management of Malawian myth is significant in the way it allows him to speak in disjointed tongues and, through metaphor, apply criticism to situations at play in the country. Moreover it delineates the poet’s attempt to grapple with the need to imprint on the minds of people a declining oral culture.²⁵⁰ In the case of Steve Chimombo, his long poem “Napolo” is composed in the form of an epic. In so far as epic poetry exceeds ‘dimensions of reality’,²⁵¹ Chimombo’s poetry ensues in a struggle with ‘otherness’. Aggression necessarily permeates in the twists

²⁵⁰Evident in “Glory Be to Chingwe’s Hole” as well as in “If Chiuta Were Man”.

²⁵¹With reference to the note on ‘epic’, see footnote 228 in this chapter, and Mthathiwa (2011).

and turns of this metamorphic poem. In other works, the poets display mutations and dramatize instabilities on the foreground of literary imagery. Chipasula, for instance, adopts a succulent mango to butcher; from Mnthali's "sunless groves" (Mnthalali 1980: 44) anxiety emanates; the merit of the fig tree is torn down in Mphande's poetry.

Beyond distinguishing factors, and while there is irony in saying this, it is apparent that out of poetic disjuncture, fraught in style, form and/or content, a sense of clarity is fashioned in the anthology of poems presented in this book. A Malawian sensibility of home is revealed.

The poetry has demonstrated beyond the commonly thought of notion of home as physical shelter, and, as I had hoped, compels a more critical consideration. Interestingly, where physical shelter (that is, a roof and four walls) is written of, and perhaps does take precedence as a told depiction of home in the poetry, it is in the case of capture and is, in fact, overtly associated with the experience of exile. This manifests particularly in Mapanje's reflections on his time in Mikuyu prison. While this might seem strange as 'home' is often construed in the very first instance as architectural comforts, a house, what it lends is clarity by way of considering home as unboundaried. While the idea of home as a kind of shelter remains evident throughout the poetry it is rather with regards to refuge found in the creative act of writing, and not in the physical sense of walls and enclosed structure. Words, instead, are the bricks the poets build with. It is through these words, and via creativity, that symbols of rebirth and renewal aid negotiations of home. The sanity injected by way of Mnthalali's water imagery, or Mphande's life-giving rain, reinforces that from the experience of exile people might still maintain a home for

themselves in the world. Then, the highpoint of, say, the figure of Kalilombe or the stature of the Fig Tree, in Chimombo and Mphande's work respectively, lies perhaps in the meaning those symbols impress and the overall exposure of more particular Malawian sentiment and sensibility of home. For the large part, the poets "consciously resort[...] to local myth as a means of evolving a literary style rooted in the culture of their country" (Nazombe 1983: 5). Citing customary practises, such as Mnthali does with the Chop dance, extends collective consciousness. Rooted in their sense of collective identity, implanted through the management of myth and the integral sensibilities dispensed in such literary texts, the poet's creative work becomes a firm touchstone for the 'self'.²⁵² In turn, biography and myth illuminate themselves as fused.

For Mnthali, Chipasula, Mapanje, Mphande and Chimombo, home manifests itself on the basis of certain thematic trends. Transversing the collected poems, I see that home can be arrived at by way of two core themes: 'landscape' and 'relationship'. Encompassed in 'landscape', home is nature and animals, the rurality of space, and notions of life-giving elements; while ideas and understanding of kin relations, which could be family, friends, or the 'other' in the present time as well as ancestral relations in the afterlife, are necessitated in 'relationship'.

However, reasoned in the poetry, home is also the relationship *with* landscape, be it an animal, a tree, a river, or any other form or entity of the natural world. Or, indeed, of

²⁵²Such sentiment might be carried further than a Malawian context of course: that Milan Kundera's "particular foothold seems to be a rediscovery of his folk culture, as the comforts found in... roots offer him touchstones of his identity" (Lutsky, in Gutthy 2009: 108).

the cosmological world, as “The Mirage” and “The Dreamer’s Manifesto” by Mnthali well demonstrate. That is to say that the themes named above are not separate, mutually exclusive entities: the two ‘themes’ communicate and relate to one another too. Owing much to the contours of time and memory, ‘landscape’ and ‘relationship’ co-exist and weave in and out of one another to necessarily create a conversation with and of home. As such a conversation needs perpetual renewal in order to grant home its place in the world, so it is that ‘home’ cannot be one thing, but many. In this, we arrive again at the paradox that home is ever more ambiguous. One thing is distinct, however: while in the one instance it is portrayed by these Malawian poets as utopia and in the next as dystopia, home nevertheless remains indispensable in the poetry cited.

Conclusion

A Reflection on Research Findings and Spaces of Study

Research into ideas about home in poetry from Malawi remains largely entangled in political agendas. Perhaps understandable due to the overbearing nature of the Banda regime and the need to consider its legacies, this is in spite of the abundance of more cultural experiences of home expressed in the work. This book has determined that beyond the political there is more to analyse with respects to Malawi's literature and its presented ideas about home.

This conclusion comprises a negotiation of poetic reading and interpretation, and the use of interview material and fieldwork experience as means of research; and an analysis of my research findings, looking into how and to what extent the study addresses the research questions presented.

On Interpretation: using poetry, interview material and fieldwork

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting (Foucault 1990: 8-9)

We need different methods of obtaining knowledge to bring home to us the values of the world. Something that had a lasting impression on me during my time in Malawi, talking to the poets and in my readings of their poetry was that

gathering ideas about life (and, for this project, especially ideas about home) could not be reduced to abstract theories nor framed of practical activities. It was necessary for me to stretch and interrogate the norm: to think outside the box, beyond categorisation and linear definitions of terms such as 'home' and 'exile'. The embodiment of knowledge is expressed in experience and in the varying readings which may follow such experiential being. As Jackson says

...the aim of [...] empiricism is care. Its analogue in social life is empathy. Its field is experience undergone rather than gone beyond. Knowledge is seen as a form of worldly immanence, a being-with others, an under-standing. (Jackson 1995: 164)

Experience is neither one definitive thing nor the other; it was important for me to understand and conceive of both the individual and the collective in the writings I read. And, as evaluated below, I used a number of qualitative research methods in order to do so.

Literature as a means of constructing 'home'

Home is not a place that is given
(Jackson 1995: 155)

What this book has shown is that 'home' is there for the creating. Its particular focus has been the nature of literature as a site of such creation. As portrayed, literature is a place in which realities are reflected. The metaphors of a mirror and/or a window have long been used in speaking of literature in this sense, and the significance of such ideas waver very little in our contemporary world. Langar's work

gathering ideas about life (and, for this project, especially ideas about home) could not be reduced to abstract theories nor framed of practical activities. It was necessary for me to stretch and interrogate the norm: to think outside the box, beyond categorisation and linear definitions of terms such as 'home' and 'exile'. The embodiment of knowledge is expressed in experience and in the varying readings which may follow such experiential being. As Jackson says

...the aim of [...] empiricism is care. Its analogue in social life is empathy. Its field is experience undergone rather than gone beyond. Knowledge is seen as a form of worldly immanence, a being-with others, an under-standing. (Jackson 1995: 164)

Experience is neither one definitive thing nor the other; it was important for me to understand and conceive of both the individual and the collective in the writings I read. And, as evaluated below, I used a number of qualitative research methods in order to do so.

Literature as a means of constructing 'home'

Home is not a place that is given
(Jackson 1995: 155)

What this book has shown is that 'home' is there for the creating. Its particular focus has been the nature of literature as a site of such creation. As portrayed, literature is a place in which realities are reflected. The metaphors of a mirror and/or a window have long been used in speaking of literature in this sense, and the significance of such ideas waver very little in our contemporary world. Langar's work

on artistic creativity rejects absolutely the notion that representation is an objective of the artist (in Douglas 1991: 291). The idea posited is rather that art, far from depiction or mimicry, is a type of communication that sees “specialised projections of the common dimensions of experience”. As such art is naturally connected to, and shouldn’t be thought of as detached from, reality and reason (in Douglas 1991: 291). So, literature is about truth.

Shown in the particular examples of Malawian poetry, literary texts deal with the nature of the human condition. Significantly, that ‘condition’ is one of movement and is anything but static. In its concentration on exiles, the study emphasises the fact that (in both times past and in the contemporary world) an age of movement dictates ideas about home, and points to the ambiguity that fragmentation *is* sense in view of human experience.

In dealing with poetry by exiled individuals the sense of home in this book is fashioned from a personal point of view: by particular movements, emplacements and experiences in different spaces and in different ways - be it physically or metaphysically. As well as the physical experiential truth then, feeling is involved. Furman says that poetry can be related to “as the emotional microchip, in that it may serve as a compact repository for emotionally charged experiences” (Furman 2007: 1). Thus, poetic expression has the ability to “clarify and magnify existence” (Hirshfield, in Furman 2007: 1). Jackson only adds to such ideas in his discussion of literature as a medium of home, highlighting the connotation that there is a sense of existential being involved: of being at home in text: “of existential control and connectedness” (Jackson 1995: 154).

Literature, then, is a place for “effective exploration of identity issues” (White, in King, Connell and White 1995: 2). This book has illustrated that, while Jackson rightly says home is something we manage and converse with in order to be “bosses of ourselves” (my emphasis: Jackson 1995: 155), and Toni Morrison highlights that literature is “the only place where I can be myself... nobody’s daughter... mother... but, myself” (my emphasis: Morrison: May 2014), those ‘identity issues’ carry equally from the idea of the ‘self’ to that of the collective.

Certainly, I think literature, in its ability to attract diverse multidisciplinary scholarship – from social science to the humanities –, presents exciting and ever novel opportunities for interpretation and analysis. This book, in my researching poetry from Malawi, has grappled with the particular idea of home from a number of epistemological perspectives.

Exploring interview material and fieldwork for research

As Gupta and Ferguson contend (1997), “anthropological work is distinguished from work in related disciplines such as history, sociology, political science, literature, literary criticisms, religious studies, and [...] cultural studies”. The distinguishing factor is “the idea of ‘the field’” and its focus (in anthropology) upon “participant observation” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 2). While my study is perhaps most concisely described as contributing to the academic discipline of Literary studies in African studies, I persisted in opening possibilities rather than confining the spaces of analysis in my work. This book is ultimately a multi- and inter-disciplinary study, negotiating and conceiving of the ‘field’ in various ways.

Literature, then, is a place for “effective exploration of identity issues” (White, in King, Connell and White 1995: 2). This book has illustrated that, while Jackson rightly says home is something we manage and converse with in order to be “bosses of ourselves” (my emphasis: Jackson 1995: 155), and Toni Morrison highlights that literature is “the only place where I can be myself... nobody’s daughter... mother... but, myself” (my emphasis: Morrison: May 2014), those ‘identity issues’ carry equally from the idea of the ‘self’ to that of the collective.

Certainly, I think literature, in its ability to attract diverse multidisciplinary scholarship – from social science to the humanities –, presents exciting and ever novel opportunities for interpretation and analysis. This book, in my researching poetry from Malawi, has grappled with the particular idea of home from a number of epistemological perspectives.

Exploring interview material and fieldwork for research

As Gupta and Ferguson contend (1997), “anthropological work is distinguished from work in related disciplines such as history, sociology, political science, literature, literary criticisms, religious studies, and [...] cultural studies”. The distinguishing factor is “the idea of ‘the field’” and its focus (in anthropology) upon “participant observation” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 2). While my study is perhaps most concisely described as contributing to the academic discipline of Literary studies in African studies, I persisted in opening possibilities rather than confining the spaces of analysis in my work. This book is ultimately a multi- and inter-disciplinary study, negotiating and conceiving of the ‘field’ in various ways.

Through fieldwork I sought to understand what it means to be in place in Malawi, and to be in-touch with all aspects of the term 'home' in relation to this country – that is, the land, its geographical mapping, its peoples, and so on. In being there I hope that my research has gone some ways to overcoming the not uncommon researcher-subject divisions that can occur and towards better, more democratic production of knowledge.

While my fieldwork may not occupy 'multi-sited' fieldwork in the sense that it focuses on one country, I conducted research in many spaces, in and out of that country, by considering a number of poets and a number of concepts within the context of a number of places: in Malawi and in the diaspora. As these poets are married to movement, in one respect or another, through their conversations with home and exile, the necessity of unbounded fieldwork can, in fact, be argued for in the case of this study. Movement is, after all, characterised by the crossing of borders – spatial, cultural and otherwise.

Gupta and Ferguson (1997) say that the field should be viewed as an interconnected space, not as any distinct, bounded place where notions such as personhood are non-negotiable. Following this, while my research focused on the small number of five Malawians, my observing of them and their work was undertaken in several different spaces as opposed to one bounded space.

Along with conducting interviews during fieldwork trips, I was able to continue conversations with poets by communicating via the internet. This proved to be a field space of its own in the way that the poets could elaborate and further construct personal relationships with the ideas of home outside of the poems I was analysing. The presumption

that Chimombo's 'Napolo', or indeed his later poem: 'The Election of the Forest Creatures' (1994), was an ambiguous portrayal of Dr. Banda and his wayward policies in Malawi was later contradicted by the author via email. This and interviews and discussions via Skype with individuals such as Professor Francis Nyamnjoh raises the notion that fieldwork is the connection between spaces – physical and/ or virtual. The case of Professor Nyamnjoh particularly highlights such an idea: speaking face-to-face with him in Cambridge, UK., in May 2013, contacting him via email during his time in Mauritius in June and then in Sao Paulo in September. Further still, we held Skype calls between London and Cape Town in July 2013. As well as pointing towards the diverse spaces of the 'field', this illustrates well the notion of emplacement in our contemporary world where movement engenders conceptions of belonging and points to the infrequency of 'home' being one certain, defined thing.

Research Findings: – Being in Place and being without place: constructing a relationship with home

On the surface, the idea of home presents a problem for exiles and, for those in question, thinking of it requires negotiation of complex feelings of displacement and loss. Exile is thought of as a lonely, solitary condition. It has long been noted by Edward Said that "the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (Said 2000: 173), and White notes that in relation to exile a common literary theme is "the metaphor of death" (White, in King, Connell and White 1995: 6). As a consequence, individuals may seek out and find solace in alternative spaces of 'home' in order to feel the comfort and

that Chimombo's 'Napolo', or indeed his later poem: 'The Election of the Forest Creatures' (1994), was an ambiguous portrayal of Dr. Banda and his wayward policies in Malawi was later contradicted by the author via email. This and interviews and discussions via Skype with individuals such as Professor Francis Nyamnjoh raises the notion that fieldwork is the connection between spaces – physical and/ or virtual. The case of Professor Nyamnjoh particularly highlights such an idea: speaking face-to-face with him in Cambridge, UK., in May 2013, contacting him via email during his time in Mauritius in June and then in Sao Paulo in September. Further still, we held Skype calls between London and Cape Town in July 2013. As well as pointing towards the diverse spaces of the 'field', this illustrates well the notion of emplacement in our contemporary world where movement engenders conceptions of belonging and points to the infrequency of 'home' being one certain, defined thing.

Research Findings: – Being in Place and being without place: constructing a relationship with home

On the surface, the idea of home presents a problem for exiles and, for those in question, thinking of it requires negotiation of complex feelings of displacement and loss. Exile is thought of as a lonely, solitary condition. It has long been noted by Edward Said that "the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (Said 2000: 173), and White notes that in relation to exile a common literary theme is "the metaphor of death" (White, in King, Connell and White 1995: 6). As a consequence, individuals may seek out and find solace in alternative spaces of 'home' in order to feel the comfort and

security of the absent physical place. In emphasizing this point, and very much linked to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's words that "the idea of belonging needn't come with the baggage of negativity" (May 2014, Copenhagen), exile is not, then, necessarily a negative thing. Jackson says home is where growing up happens; it is the occurrence of a journey "where life is upheld in the work of human hands" (1995: 157). The 'work of human hands' emphasised in this book has been that of creative literary work, and, through the experience of exile portrayed therein, the idea has been confirmed "that the meaning of home cannot be sought in the substantive, though it may find expression in the substantive, like [...] house" (Jackson 1995: 157).

My findings have suggested that ideas about home may be configured concisely in thematic terms: as 'landscape' and as 'relationship'. While the poetry analysed has illustrated that the themes stand alone in view of their respective conversations with 'home', they communicate with, or relate to, one another too. That is to say that a person will hold views and have a relationship with the idea of home through aspects of landscape, be it a tree, river, or a particular terrain. So, the two: 'landscape' and 'relationship' dance with one another, taking each other's hands and embracing from time to time. But the dance is not simply one creation. It is never an identical routine. It has been shown in this study that 'home' is constantly re-created, re-imagined, re-written: forever flirting with re-newal.

I have spoken of the fashioning of 'home' from the experience of exile in terms of the thread of 'poetic disorder' identified in the poetry. This was not intended to bow to the idea that exile is synonymous with dys-function, death or negativity generally. 'Poetic disorder' is used to highlight the

style of poetics adopted by the poets to speak of the transformation of 'home' those that are exiled experience. The discussion of 'poetic disorder' went some way in illustrating the notion of the 'self', and the idea that 'home' is framed by biographies and personal experiences of exile.

Meanwhile, as the section: 'Literature as a means of constructing 'home'' points to, this book has dealt with the idea of truth through its looking into Malawian creative literary texts. That is that literature, as art, is about truth. I do not pretend to possess an answer to what constitutes worldwide truth, however, nor, by any means, an 'African' conception of it. Here, I merely mean to exemplify a Chewa²⁵³ notion of truth in order to highlight and conclude on some of the points written in the book, specific to Malawi and in relation to the 'self' and the collective.

Simply put, in Chichewa, the equivalent to the English 'truth' is *zoonā* (Kaphagawani, in Coetzee and Roux 1998: 240).²⁵⁴ Its literal meaning is 'the seen', *kuona*.²⁵⁵ Thus, as Kaphagawani says, what is viewed as "true among the Chewa is what is seen" (Kaphagawani, in Coetzee and Roux 1998: 241), and so, while visual experience is synonymous to seeing, the truth can be explained as that which is experienced. This, however, does not confine the notion of the truth among Chichewa speakers to experiential knowledge alone: "implying that their notion of truth is empirical rather than non-empirical or rational". Truth requires imagination as well as visual experience in Chewa culture. The point

²⁵³ The Chewa are one of the largest ethnic groups in Malawi.

²⁵⁴ For more in depth analysis of Chichewa and the idea of truth see Kaphagawani's study: "Themes in a Chewa Epistemology" (in Coetzee, P. H., and Roux. A. P. J., 1998. *The African Philosophy Reader*).

²⁵⁵ *Ku-* as the infinitive particle "to", and *-ona* as the veb "see" (Kaphagawani, in Coetzee and Roux 1998: 240).

Kaphagawani makes and which I wish to emphasise is the passivity of *zoonā*, ‘the seen’. As said, what is true is what is seen. But, importantly, the idea of who is doing the seeing remains an open one (Kaphagawani, in Coetzee and Roux 1998: 240). A summary follows that compliments the arguments posed in this book, that

whatever is seen, perceived or experienced individually or collectively is, for the Chewa, the truth from the point of view of that specific individual’s or group’s experience (Kaphagawani, in Coetzee and Roux 1998: 240).

As was set out at the beginning of the book, I intended to answer how spaces of home are configured in Malawian poetry, how they reflect the ‘self’, and how those ideas about both home and exile, while experienced by the named poets, speak of wider Malawian sensibilities. It is relatively easy to find and appreciate expressions of home in everyday life in Malawi. Travelling in the country – from village to village; from village to town or city; or further, from the north to the south of the country –, gave me great insight into experiential and imagined notions of home among Malawians. The sense of belonging that people have in the country is evidently very much tied to the home village. *Mudzi* (‘village’), as Englund says, can be translated as ‘home, or as ‘our place’ (*kwathu*), and, in fact, “defines the idealised haven” (Englund 2002: 137; 154). In contemporary Malawi, it is despite transnational migration and urbanisation that the distinction between ‘villagers’ and ‘townspeople’ cannot stand fast with the idea of ‘home’ in mind. The reality in Malawi is one in which ‘home’ is experienced and recounted in poetic, if unwritten,

ways in relation to one's roots: one's village, and all that that encompasses.

Concluding Remarks

I have by no means given an exhaustive list of Malawian poetry or its discourse on negotiations of home. Furthermore, whether or not the five Malawian poets here are unique in fashioning transformations of 'home' from experiences of exile would depend upon comparative studies. But, for present evaluation it seems that certain characteristics are illuminated as indelible to a Malawian sense of home and are also universally salient.

It is shown that, by way of physical and/or psychological exilic experience, the Malawian poets illustrate negotiations of 'home', and its effects on them, through poetics of disorder. While home mutates in contact with exile, it seemingly becomes clearer with distance and through creativity. It is certain that literary creativity is portrayed as upholding its place as home for these five exiles.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this project, researching a homeland, Malawi. And, while grappling with issues of the 'self', it has been a touchstone for my-self, reflecting personal conversations I was having with 'home' during my writing. As a final note, I would like to add that there is much work to do with respects to the exploration of Malawi's literature. While the novelty of this is exciting, such understanding must now be realised and pursued.

ways in relation to one's roots: one's village, and all that that encompasses.

Concluding Remarks

I have by no means given an exhaustive list of Malawian poetry or its discourse on negotiations of home. Furthermore, whether or not the five Malawian poets here are unique in fashioning transformations of 'home' from experiences of exile would depend upon comparative studies. But, for present evaluation it seems that certain characteristics are illuminated as indelible to a Malawian sense of home and are also universally salient.

It is shown that, by way of physical and/or psychological exilic experience, the Malawian poets illustrate negotiations of 'home', and its effects on them, through poetics of disorder. While home mutates in contact with exile, it seemingly becomes clearer with distance and through creativity. It is certain that literary creativity is portrayed as upholding its place as home for these five exiles.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this project, researching a homeland, Malawi. And, while grappling with issues of the 'self', it has been a touchstone for my-self, reflecting personal conversations I was having with 'home' during my writing. As a final note, I would like to add that there is much work to do with respects to the exploration of Malawi's literature. While the novelty of this is exciting, such understanding must now be realised and pursued.

Appendix

The Poems

-in order of the poet's appearance in the book:

Felix Mnthali

“Napolo, The Landslide”

This is it, is it not?
quite close to our walled
and forbidden cities:
that landslide names Napolo,
Chimombo's
cataclysmic crack
in the cradle of mankind.

We sum ourselves aboard Napolo's rocks
plant bougainvillea
roses and jacarandas
sugar canes and bananas
in his sacred path

Some would say that the fault
across Zomba Mountain
descending into Phalombe plain
was part of the pain
within the birth-canal of the Great Rift Valley
begetting inland lakes
continental rivers
and snow-capped mountains

but deep in the catacombs
where convulsions simmered
in congested cells
not many cried, not many bowed:
the living merely nodding
to those dying and about to die
and no one shouted:
'Caesar, morituri te salutant!'

They were no martyrs
for theirs was no great cause
only Napolo hurling rocks
from a tenderised earth.

The crack remains;
the cradle is gone
to support tufts of flowers and weeds:
the lair of prowling leopards
the cavern of man-eating vultures

Do poets and engineers
physicians and painters
these new interpreters
around their new Pharaohs
remember
do they remember
Napolo?
(1980: 28-29)

“The Mlunguzi River on New Year’s Day”

From nondescript sources
on Zomba Plateau
the Mlunguzi cascades
below mountain villas and summer cottages
through the sunless groves
behind academics’ houses
to meander through the fields
of rich and poor alike –

Oh, yes, we are a going concern here
with chimneys that puff black smoke
in Blantyre and Lilongwe
and storage sheds bursting to the seams
with maize, beans, groundnuts
with rice, cotton, and tobacco

Some of us bid farewell
to the departed year
in swirls of brandy, whiskey and soda
and gusts of imported perfumes
in discos, colonial mansions
and lakeside retreats

Others slept the sleep of tired bodies
having gone to bed early
to be ready for the dawn
for the stretch that breaks their backs
I see them now on the banks of the Mlunguzi
hoes swinging over a reluctant earth
sliding to their approach –

While we snore our memories away
and dream of sliding up and down
the greasy pole
of colonial mansions
and lakeside retreats.

What do we know about time
we zombies that crack up
and perish
at the whim of invisible masters?
What do we know about time?

The scorching heat of October
never finds is breaking a stone-hearted earth
and we do not weed
tangled gardens in December
or swampy rice fields in March
What do we know about time?

The Mlunguzi River
fierce in its indifference
cascades and foams on its banks
from the summer cottages
around Ku Chawe Inn
to the fields of Phalombe.
(1980: 44-45)

“The Reply from the city”

(for Jack Mapanje)

From us to you, dear Sisters,
sad, very sad, that one
about you still living on bonongwe
and still exposing your you know what

To hear you sing
and recite our creed
one would think
the millennium had come

We on our part
have been taking in ours strides
wars and rumours of war
Ayatollahs, Shahs, Idi Amins,
detentions and aftermaths of detentions,
these catarrhs and measles
in the winds of change

To quote the poet
‘we have been living and partly living’
trying to see the silhouette
behind our blurred vision
of the beauty of dawn

We have heard the news
but we need time
to follow your footsteps
to this land
where rivers flow

not with the clear waters of Mulunguzi
but with milk and honey.
(1980: 68-69)

“The Dreamer’s Manifesto”

Now that the moon
with its American flag
bearing the viruses
and the feat of the astronauts comes beaming across the
lake
between the hills the rays and the shadows
of a half-forgotten youth

Yes, I remember you;

Yes, I think of you;

Yes, I dream you.

Now that Zomba Mountain
this gargantuan beauty
which guards the gate to infinity
begins to resemble
those mountains of my dreams

And now that the valleys
supporting Chancellor College that cradle of our
millennium
have sunk into the night before Creation
inviting us to fly as in the dreams of our youth

to we know not where
I shall inhale in peace
those haunting breezes
and those youthful aches
and that paroxysm of tears
from the scintillating notes
of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

I shall
as ever
gyrate and twist
genuflect and roll
pass out and die
at those etherising drills
of Wilson Pickett
and Johnny Nash
James Brown and
Otis Redding.

Then quietly and gently
'trying a little tenderness'
I shall insinuate myself
into the rhythm of your ecstasy
a minute to the hour
when heaven and earth
those old insatiable lovers
are crooning their blues
to the rhythm of highlife
and unending chachacha.

The warriors at Ingoma
the nobles promenading in Ndingara

the nimble bodies
rippling at the Chopin
and the classicists waving their batons
belong
not two worlds
or even three
but to the world.
(1980: 97-98)

“The Mirage”

I longed to return
to the moment of failure
and I longed to touch
the fences of the mirage.

There would be light
at the heart of the mirage
Though the light might hold
only the shadows of the sands
burning with the heat of desolation.

There would be laughter
in the heat of the desert
creaking out of bodies
that would no longer die.

But I longed oh I longed
to return to the beginning
to the roots of hope
and the fibres of faith.

for now many bombs later
the cells await creation
and the molecules beamed
from suspended possibilities
the hope of reconstruction

and so
I crave for the beginning
I crave to witness
the delirium of atoms
awaiting fission.
(1980: 102)

“Prayer for a Butterfly”

I returned to the desert
to embrace the miracle
dancing in the whirlwind
and perhaps to stumble
on the memento
of a vanished millennium
and discovered in a trance
a butterfly
conversing with the sun.

I know I can no longer speak in tongues
nor command the sun to stand still
and in the circle of my shadow
the blind can no longer see
since with the hem of God's gown
I multiply the garbage

abandoned by mankind.
May this butterfly
Go on flying
When the fingers now clutching it
are one with the dust
of the universe

May this butterfly still dance
when its wings and its colours
are one
with the vapours of this earth.

But if
on its safari into the unknown
this butterfly
which exchanges laughter
and jokes with the sun
should find warmth in my weary hands
far enough from the sun
and near enough to this earth
and if
the dream in my eyes
should carry
not only heaven and earth
but also
flowers and insects,
men, women and children.
I will accept, yes I will
love, truth and joy
all those deeds and all those names
by which God is known.

Neither the butterfly
nor my dream I know
can live on forever
and I am doomed
to return to the desert...

to look for the miracle
dancing in the whirlwind
and perhaps to stumble
on the memento of the millennium that was;
to discover
as ever and for ever
a butterfly
conversing with the sun.
(1980: 108-109)

Frank Chipasula

“A Love Poem for my country”

I have nothing to give you, but my anger
And the filaments of my hatred reach across the border.
You, you have sold many and me to exile.
Now shorn of precious minds, you rely only on
What hands grow to build your crumbling image.

Your streets are littered with handcuffed men
And the drums are thuds of the warden's spiked boots.
You wriggle with agony as the terrible twins, law and
order,
Call out the tune through the thick tunnel of barbed wire.

Here, week after week, the walls dissolve and are slim,
The mist is clearing and we see you naked like
A body that is straining to find itself but cannot
And our hearts are thumping with pulses of desire or fear
And our dreams are charred chapters of your history.

My country, remember I neither blinked nor went to
sleep

My country, I never let your life slide downhill
And passively watched you, like a recklessly-driven car,
Hurrying to your crash while the driver leapt out.

The days have lost their song and salt.
We feel bored without our free laughter and voice.
Every day thinking the same and discarding our hopes.
Your days are loud with clanking cuffs
On men's arms as they are led away to decay.
I know a day will come and wash away my pain
And I will emerge from the night breaking into song
Like the sun, blowing out these evil stars.
(1991: 39-40)

“Ritual Girl”

There is a girl dragging heavy
Foot-chains, drained of her dance;
The razor sharp barbed wire
Cuts deep into her bound wrists.

We nicknamed her butterfly,
Lusty brown skin, dark fertile land;

Painted lips like a fresh sore,
Scorched hair straight like bamboos,

She could pass for a roadside bar whore
As she fainted under her ninth man
In a row, her dance ebbing slowly:

*Pound me as you dehusk your maize
Wash me like you wash your millet
Thrash me like you strip your rice
Till I am burning, spent and pure.*

That was in college, many moons ago, yet
my mind hugs the clear-cut images
of her dreamy eyes like lunar lakes
we worshipped, sought in reverence;

frail lecherous flesh, sensuous dimples,
insatiate grave, every sailor's port
of call where seagulls led us to rest
where we searched for cool clear water.

The snake-skinned banjo wailed for her
plaintively, the tea-chest bass groaned for.
We loved her as every exile loves the *patrie*;
Now our laments flow through every poem.

The lips of the singers are heavy
with her suitors' names fed to the lions;
in the dark dungeons her lovers languish
as she drags the heavy foot-irons painfully.

(1984: 9-10)

“Talking of Sharp Things”

(for Jack Mapanje and Lupenga Mphande)

I think of the razor-sharp knife
slicing through the sweetness
of a ripe mango, thoroughly ravaging
the layers of life's plentitude, its juice
running over as barbed wire digs
into bonded arms: who relishes the flesh
What thirst does this blood quench?
I think of the great sorrows of flesh
Of the country with my face mapped
with bullet-holes, machete and knobkerrie
scarred, bleeding, the arrow quivering
in its torn heart that still dances;
a heart that has vowed to sing always
Bleeding, how red the river waters,
Bleeding into the water-wells
where we all suckle at the distended breast.
My mirror shifts a little yet leaves its
edge which cuts my clear image on my land,
in the lines my inherited sweat collects.
We patch up the land with our gaping wounds;
I think of the adze that cuts a man out of wood,
Of spears cutting down a life built of labour.

I talk of pain as sharp as a hunter's dagger
Though it does not bring respite to exile.

Unseen as it is, I still talk of pain
As if it were the sharp claws of the flag cock.
I think of thorns and those other thorns
A crown full of thorns and a king who is dying
of indulgence, and a rough tree that holds him;
And of the hands that have been torn
And the hands drained of all tenderness, hands
that cannot hug or fondle without throttling
And of the mouth that will never sing again
Without a splinter of rail threatening it
Without the edge of a *phanga* guarding it
I think of other thorns lodged in the throats –
Now I talk of that which is double-pointed
And spares no one, even those who do not talk
I speak of them too and whatever spear got them,
And of Narcissus and sadist goading and laughing
His ribs split by a happiness lined with pain.
I must stop and wonder how the armless wind
whips stings pierces tears and escapes uncaught!
And of slogans that are launched like harpoons
And of the many who have perished under them

And of sharp jagged rocks hurled at the enemy
And of all those patriots shouting, 'Stone him!
Stone him!' And the rushing, thrashing until what was
becomes only pulp cast into rivers
insatiable as the mass graves dotted across the land.
I shall speak of betrayal too and the last supper
in which shrapnel is hidden and served or
the spring mattress with pointed knives in the foam
and of the man who took the woman violently
there and paid for it in his blood;

And of the land that suffers silently like sheep;
Of the strange wedge driven permanently between people
Hallelujah! Of the nails and the heavy hammers
pinning the flesh and its attendant sins to crucifix
and of the death drooping down the rough wood.
And then three cheers for the Party and threefold for
The Leader a snake in three-piece rich rages and a mouth
endowed with incisors and fangs and words that bite
and kill like the sharp tail of the whirlwind dancing
in our country, descending the mountains and gripping
the trees, uprooting them and sweeping the valleys.

I have to talk of this or that, of love perhaps,
and stumble or stammer on that forbidden word
or of a kiss whose fangs completely rip off the lovers'
lips;
of massacres and mass axe murders and the sale of blood
to South Africa crossing apartheid's lines, always
mysterious
deeds done in the deep nights, Chilobwe or something
And ramble sometimes as chaotic as the world;
I have to talk of Messiahs, their cathedrals and sword-like
spires that rend our pagan hearts as they convert them;
Perhaps of a blind root that burrows instinctively
And attempts desperately to reach the depths of our lives.
Maybe I must talk of the man who carries pain in
himself intimately
like a child that waits to be born, but refuses to die.
But now let me turn to a needle and its invisible thread
and the tattered body of my country that waits to be
sewn.

(1984: 11-13)

“Going back patiently”

And here we are back
to the point we started from
trying to trace the path we took
but finding only traces and trails of ash
on burned down tarmac highways
showing that we too contributed
to our own destruction
letting it go on
as if it never mattered.

And if we should decide
we shall clear a new one elsewhere
in the depths of the lost primeval forest
which was face lifted and grafted
upon foreign streets for pavement
all glittering with false imitation rubies
we are back to the untimed times
and must dig and patiently too.

Then we scan the footprints of our memory
and imagination for possible clues
But violent winds have mercilessly blown
them out of our boulder-smashed minds
pell-mell into dust clouds
and laughing breezes watch us patiently digging.
Going back patiently
to starting point, eavesdropping
at keyholes to the locked past
we are punished for window-peeping
And we must ask and ask and ask

about the hidden road that Chilembwe took,
sitting at crossroads in dilemma
watching our leaders embrace our enemies;
or starting off again on the blind road. (1991: 37-38)

“Because the wind remembers”

The hideous laughter
of your invisible mockingbird
still hangs at the edge
of my sleep, tears through my dreams.
The rock that flattens a brother's chest
letting out that bitter crimson river
flowing incessantly in our land
turns my dreams into nightmares.
The dark wind sobs and hangs in tears
on the night air and the moon
light that burns through it.
Because the wind remembers
Because its thundering sobs are our own;
in it are the howled exclamations
of bursting genitals squeezed
between blunt pincers in dark dungeons
and the huge teeth of the whip
biting into the flesh of our country
This wild breath of the bleeding wind
caught like lace round the emaciated legs
of a village dance drunk on blood
screams as the dawn is plunged into night.
The bird's deep whimper in the dense woods
stabs the lake with a secret lightning.

Ah, there goes again its raw ghostly
laughter like heavy guns thundering.

(in Maja-Pearce 1990: 173)

“Manifesto on Arts Poetica’

My poetry is exacting a confession
from me: I will not keep the truth
from my song and the heartstringed instrument;
The voice undressed by the bees,
I will not bar the voice undressed by the bees
from entering the gourd of my bow-harp.
I will not wash the blood off the image
I will let it flow from the gullet
slit by the assassin’s dagger through
the run-on line until it rages in the verbs of terror;
And I will distil life into the horrible adjectives;
I will not clean the poem to impress the tyrant

I will not bend my verses into the bow of a praise song.
I will put the symbols of murder hidden in high offices
in the center of my crude lines of accusations.
I will undress our raped land and expose her wounds.
I will pierce the silence around our land with sharp
metaphors
And I will point the light of my poems into the dark
nooks where our people are pounded to pulp.
I will not coat my words in lumps of sugar
I will serve them to our people with the bitter quinine:
I will not keep the truth from my heartstringed guitar;

I will thread the voice from the broken lips
through my volatile verbs that burn the lies.
I will ask only that the poem watch the world closely;
I will ask only that the image put a lamp on the dark
ceiling in the dark sky of my land and light the dirt.
Today, my poetry has exacted a confession from me.

(1991: 108)

Jack Mapanje

“Glory Be to Chingwe’s Hole”

Chingwe’s hole, you devoured the Chief’s prisoners
Once, easy villagers decked in leopard colours
Pounding down their energies and their sight.
You choked minstrel lovers with wild granadilla
Once, rolling under burning flamboyant trees.

Do you remember Frog the carver carving Ebony
Beauty?

Do you remember Frog’s pin on Ebony Beauty’s head
That brought Ebony to life? And when the Chief
Heard of a beauty betrothed to Frog, whose dogs
Beat up the bushes to claim Ebony for the Chief?

Even when Fly alarmed Frog of the impending hounds
Who cracked Fly’s bones? Chingwe’s Hole, woodpeckers
Once poised for vermillion strawberries merely
Watched fellow squirrels bundled up in sacks
Alive as your jaws gnawed at their brittle bones.

Chingwe’s Hole, how dare I praise you knowing whose
Marrow still flows in murky Namitembo River below
you?

You strangled our details boasting your plush dishes,
Dare I glorify your rope and depth epitomizing horror?
(1981: 44)

“If Chiuta Were Man”

I. The Soft Landing
Woman, hold my shoulders
We'll drift and drift until
We reach the promised Nsinja
Forest and river of life.

When our safari is done
We'll tell all animals and
Chiuta of our soft landing
Imploring them to follow suit.

Meanwhile hold on woman
Let's glide and glide
On our pioneer project:
Hope is our only hope. (7)

II. The First Fire
Hard wood upon soft wood twirling
Sparks a sudden riot of mothers and babies.

Corrosive flames devour Nsinja Forest
Chiuta's abode belches and blazes.

When frenzied lions storm, jackals
Crackle gaping at man's invention.

The stampede thus whacked thuds away
Free from the hissing eggshells.

Only dogs, tails between legs
Cower under the Man's fiery arm.

III. Man On Chiuta's Ascension
When you disgruntled spiralled
On Spider's frail thread
Swearing you'd see us die feeling
The pain of our invention,

When you thundering angry voices
That still send us scurrying for
Shelter promised your urine to save us
From our unquenchable fire,

When you on your multi-coloured
Bow on Ntiwa Hill declared
You'd stop your bleeding urine
If we did not improve,

Why, Chiuta, scampering on
Spider's thread to your Ivory Tower,
Why didn't you also warn
Our eyes would forever be smokey?

IV. So God Became a Chameleon
A muezzin
with gelded
tongue
slunk in
celibacy

A politician
empiric
muffing
easy balls
fearing fear
(1981: 7-10)

“Drinking the Water from its Source”

Distancing ourselves now our metaphors sharpen
We say drink the water from its source naively
Probably thinking of its purity, our salvation
Of the dead empire. We know only too well that
All water springs from sources so inscrutable
Yet drinking water far from the sources we often
Exalt our images heedless of the minor details:
Streams gather debris from antique sun-spots
Depositing the slit onto infinite sand-beds
The gliding Shire River mystifies us watering
Our golden lives, and tantalized we then conclude
The source of the waters must be more exotic.

But drinking the water from the source is like
A prayer: after we have slipped out of our
Sandals washing our grey feet for the moment
We only seek the point of our troubled voices
Hoping thereby to reassemble our broken confidence
We know that after the prayer we'll slip back
Into our sandals buckling more dust, probing
Greater salvation, again watching the hour when
The muezzin should raise his voice for another

Congregation. Drinking water from the sources
We must turn back to the peripheral mosaics of home
Revealing the depth of their natural negatives.
(1981: 33)

“Visiting Zomba Plateau”

Could I have come back to you to wince
Under the blur of your negatives,
To sit before braziers without the glow
Of charcoal, to cringe at your rivers
That without their hippos and crocs
Merely trickle gratingly down, to watch
Dragonflies that no longer fascinate and
Puff-adders that have lost their puff?
Where is your charming hyena tail –
Praying-mantis who cared for prayers once?
Where is the spirit that touched the hearts
Lightly – chameleon colours of home?
Where is your creation myth? Have I come
To witness the carving and jingling only of
Your bloated images and piddling mirrors?
(1981: 42)

“When the Watery Monsters Argued”

When he revisited the Milimbo Lagoon of
His childhood he found it had rock-dried:
His dugout canoe, the driftwood, fish-traps,
The fishing tackle and the worms for bait,

Even the stubborn mudfish had moved on;

Only ghosts, watery beasts, surged forward
From the reed bushes of their barren lagoon,
Extending their wise handshakes and arguing,
'Man, neither cast this change of fortunes to
The winds nor reject your ancestral wisdom;

Do not waste your bitter herb on our bones,
We were messengers of your destiny;
Forget the past, forget whatever we inflicted
On you; people are now riding on the dreams
We denied them decades ago; now more than

Ever before this young nation should not be
Allowed to wallow in the past, the exigencies
Of building this glowing nation must precede
Everything and think positive, think future
Without retribution, without malice...' Yet

As the watery presences paddled their daft
Sinking raft to their fisheagle island invoking
TODAYS without their yesterdays, he wept at
The blisters of their future without its present,
He began to see what the fiends really meant:

He knew the silence their beastly transition
Offered was neither victory nor antidote for
The wounds the watery freaks had inflicted;
He knew that weathering their weeping scars
Would incite other bitter tears, he then swore:

'Brethren, golden glories are hard to police,
But do not ask us to forget the past, and how
Could poetry forget the past when Africa still
Bleeds from forgetting its past; empower others
To forget your past – my struggle continues!'

(1998: 73)

“Swallows for my son at seven”

When you pulled at my scruffy
beard son, buoyant on my lap,
after twenty-two months of my
abduction, then asked when daddy
would come back home, it was
the visitors' bench that squeaked
before I could retort: *not to worry son,*
I'd be back home soon and grinning
you yelled *oh, when?* But I must
confess son, I merely wanted to
see the milk-white teeth on your
beaming face again. And when
you asked did I truly steal from
the university to be jailed, as your
mates at school mocked and I said:
nothing there worth stealing son, and I
don't steal, anyway, I must admit I
hoped you'd not notice the tears
on your mum's and sisters' cheeks
on you first visit.

But when you had to go,
after their fifteen minutes, stunned
why prison guards viciously break
the loaves of bread people bring,
you should have seen my mates'
rapture at what I lifted on their
imaginary security grounds; and
I must say, even I smiled at their
post mortem of your visit, son. It's
only after their whimper about
what I'd nicked that I remembered
I should've told you how swallows
of Mozambique drift with the coastal
winds each season, to nest and breed
in A-wing, and how we often fight
when their chicks fall to ground
the condemned desiring to fry and
crack the brittle bones to brighten
their meal, the 'politicals' wishing
the chicks could just fly away, free.
(2009: 37)

Lupenga Mphande

“Princess of the Plateau”

I, even I, who gallop with zebras in the wind at dawn
Saw lady of the plateau rise at cock's crow silhouetted
against
Cloud shades of grey in dry tinted air and merge with
lake's
Sun flames as she strode over morning haze to interview
virgins

I, even I, know the paths through the plateau
Whose breeze I breathe;

She sauntered along pebbles in shimmers of her bead
necklace,
Sepia brown her turban, mountain dun her fan, fire
amber
Her sandals, her shawl black, red, green undulating free
In the breeze to the flutter of palm leaves along the shore

I, even I, know the paths through the plateau
Whose breeze I breathe;

She raced against otters in streams; shielding the fish
Sprinted past packs of wolves, tooting her horn at the
antelope
Of mottled mtowa her bow, arrows shine silver-shafts
flickering
In sun's rays as she darted between hoofmarks tracking
poachers

I, even I, know the paths through the plateau
Whose breathe I breathe;

The princess sang to the wind in the yellow and blue
sunset,
Pausing among poolside poinsettias, edged by fragrant
reeds
Stooping in flower, ivory white her teeth, sparkling stars
her eyes
Her voice crystallizing into rain as she knelt in
supplication

I, even I, know the paths through the plateau
Whose breathe I breathe.
(1998: 2-3)

“Thoza View”

I like the view of Thoza from ridges below
laced with springs,
Pathchwork fields lush and green,
staggered with mlombwa trees
And boulders pocked with grey
that trail hills to the lake.
I like walking spacious woods
on edges peopled with sunbirds,
Rambling criss-cross waves of fields
that dot the landscape.
In season bee hunters swarm the hills,
yodel to honey-guides
Rain-washed hills rise shrouded in green canopies

and wafts of lilac fragrance
Permeate village dwellings along greenbanks
with reeds flowering in white - -
Only in Thozza, and only here can you bask
in so much sunshine

But closer up, way beyond dotted dwelling
Where the cool hillsun gives way
To the cold glittering night sky
I hear people ride hyenas in the dark:
I have walked along past Ng'onomo's kraal
Right up to Hora where Ngoni conquerors
Were warped in their sleep by their slaves.
At Ephangweni I see a hundred years later
How the chief there inverts his court:
Girls in his area are loose
And powerful men age early.
Among themselves, the people say
One cannot see Thozza through the haze.
(1998: 24-25)

“The Fig Tree”

Looking up from my verandah, wide-eyed
In the starlight, I watch the sky frame
the fig tree, branches strung out
Like brooding hen, fragrant.
Blossom fills the night air, leaves
flash, rustling, swaying
above my thatch, and I step closer.
What is its age, I wonder;

In cold seasons when I sit by the fireside
I can hear the tree wail in the night,
its tracery seething in the breeze
as its old leaves lift into the air
and flutter down to the boulders below;

In the hot season the village council
holds its court in the tree shade,
and elders dispense weighty issues
while leaves listen and mousebirds
bicker with squirrels over ripe figs,
cobbling the lawn with their droppings.
The village ponders: how did the tree come to be?
The tree, they know, has stood there rooted
in the red soil, a delight to the eye,
a monument to whoever planted it;

And when the village was built
young people etched their names
in the tree bark for posterity.
But now, I hear, times being as they are,
the council has voted to cut the tree down
and barter the wood away to tobacco farmers.
(1998: 43-44)

“Scanning for Rain”

We set out at dawn, travelling light against scorching
Heat waves, processing slowly toward the sacred
Rock, messengers to signal Leza of lightning and thunder
Who lives in the rainbow: ‘Chiuta, creator of fire and rain,

Who makes mountains tremble and rivers flood
Listen to cries of children in the hot sun
Listen to bleating of goats and mooing of cows
Intercede on our behalf and bring us rain.' I was the
youth
To fetch *kwela* the rainbird, a witness to the sacrifice;

We slit the bird by the riverbank, tied its entrails
To the casque and threw them into eddies: 'You Leza,
who is
Spirit, hear our prayer. We praise you the same way
As our forefathers: *Tomoka, Sambizga, NyaChunda* praised
you
Under this same rock, and you heard them
And brought them rain of prosperity. We beseech you
Enjoin the cycle, be on our side and end the drought.
Let the scarlet of the hornbill glow into life-giving rain,
Be with us always, we who are your children;'

We went round the sacred rock several times,
Sprinkling millet gruel around the base.
The fire was drilled and sacrifices made.
I was a witness at the riverside, one who stood
To point out the morning star and scan for rain clouds.
A patch appeared, wept alligator tears, then blew away.
After libation we filed home, silent, our eyes glazed over.
Trees stooped bare, the sky remained purple blue.
No other clouds formed;

An eerie silence enveloped the village, occasionally
Broken by stench and buzz of goldflies that sparkled
In bright sun, marking out bloating children. 'The earth

Cannot hold any more bodies,' wailed grave-diggers,
And the earth was hard. Acres and acres of farmland
Were left soured. Rain did not come.
(1998: 49-50)

“Visiting Friends”

I mean to visit Thoza one more time
Touch again the rock I haven't seen
Since banishment at the hands of that upstart.
While at Thoza I mean to visit Mtowole and Ephangweni
In January when the green brooks at sunrise
Are soaked in tints of gold that make a mockery of
heaven
And the rainstorms, for weeks sometimes,
Dare you venture one step beyond your grass thatched
verandah.
I want to once again take the herd out to pasture
Eat wild fruits while the cows graze
And, as in the past, I will sing again
Songs of the season in echo to thrushes,
And carve fighting bulls from clay
By the riverside at noon.

Some distance west of my village
Down the reedy valley of Lwasozi
Two of the childhood friends lie in the sand
Barely two miles from each other,
And there on a Sunday morning
I mean to go and visit
Friends I have not seen in decades.

Wet to the skin, perhaps,
I will brave the storm alone, if need be,
Wade across Lwasozi sand, step by step
Grasping at river reeds for support,
Slashing the grass with my feet, and
Look for their moulds on which to plant the flowers,
I will not be deterred, for the journey has to be made.
When a school boy at Embangweni
I never thought for a moment
That Tichafa and Vuso would so soon
Depart for those god forsaken sandbanks,
Leaving me alone to build the schools and clinics
Of our childhood dreams.
(1998: 56-57)

“Returning to Thoza”

It was early morning when I dropped off
the bus at Thoza junction and watched mist lift from
brooks.
It was a glorious morning
drenched in Spring sunlight, sun's rays
turning dewdrops into diamonds among flowers
of lilies and poinsettia. After years of absence
browsing in concrete jungles abroad
I stood silenced by a presence in the air
emanating, I was sure, from solitary
outcrops of rocks scattered over ridges.
In the valley below the deciduous
were abloom, and I bathed in wafts
of blossoms of season, struck by promise

of happiness and joy.

Then I picked my way through familiar villages,
satiated with pleasurable feelings at the chatter
of women tending their fires, the clatter of ox carts
over river pebbles, the chirrup of children
shambling up to me.

We all have birthmarks and stand in awe of the stars,
it is not good for the old to linger out in the cold.
When I look back now at my age I see moments
of hope and despair, times I did not say what I should
have said, did not do what I ought to have done,
when, out of fear, I remained silent. Once,
I stretched my hand to pass a mango fruit, but a child
bit my finger and I withdrew my hand. I cut a rose
in the morning but its blossom wilted in the sun
enroute to the intended. I have been a man sitting
on the fence, listening to the wind at midnight,
fearing aches of a cold touch. I have written
many novels in titles only.

Yet my body attains a certain rebirth
on these ridges where first toddled bare.
In days of tyranny and tribulation
I depend now on this feeling:
Thoza my village waits for me.
(1998: 59-60)

Steve Chimombo

“Napolo”

I. NAPOLO

THE APOCALYPSE

Mlauli’s tomb roared:

“Mphirimo! Mphirimo! Mphirimo!

Kubzabwera Napolo!”

M’bona was checked in mid-leap,

Chilembwe turned over and went back to sleep.

Mulanje, Zomba, and Nyika fled their places,
whimpered and hid their faces.

Shire curled round its course and bit its tail.

Lilongwe reared its head bit it was too frail.

Songwe exploded and threw its seed
into the lake where it caught typhoid.

Yes, it rained.

Oh, how it rained that time!

The parched throat of the earth drank it up,
swelled its stomach in pregnancy:

but it came so late,

and with it came Napolo.

Napolo gnawed the womb of the earth,

the earth groaned and aborted showing its teeth,

its teeth uprooted the trees on the banks,

the banks where birds sang around the python’s flanks.

THE PATH

I washed my feet in the waters of Mulungusi
and anointed myself with the blood
of those Napolo left unburied.
I tied the loincloth around me in a tight knot:
it was a perilous climb up Kaphirintiwa.

And did Napolo pass here indeed?
The trembling earth under my feet?
The roaring waters around my ears?
The hurtling mountains?

The desolation of the shrines
portends retribution
and revision.

And did Napolo pass here indeed?
Was all that for this?
This ritual of bloodletting?
And that to a deranged god creating
These strange forms of death?

I will to the mountain top
and there divine the message
Napolo brought.
I had washed my feet in the waters of Mulungusi.

THE MESSENGERS

Napolo has spoken: Death.
The lizard scuttled in the undergrowth;
the excitement he carried did not burden him.
Mankind awaited his coming.

Napolo has spoken: Life.
The Chameleon stopped to consider
a joint in his leg and hesitated.
He rolled an eye behind and in front,
The shrubbery swallowed his form.
Mankind awaited his coming.

Napolo has spoken:
The main in the loincloth came to us at dawn.
We gathered round to hear the message,
But did not understand.
He spoke to us in a strange tongue
and we greeted it with laughter.
He turned his back on us;
now we shall never know.
And yet Napolo has spoken.

THE MESSAGE

Was it a decade after Napolo
I met you, friend?
No matter.
We lived to tell the story around the fire
in whispers and behind locked doors.
We are going to laugh together again
with empty mouths,
and dead eyes:
grimaces echoing hollowed minds.

Review what is left unsaid,
and, after we have parted,
we will know
what it is we wanted to say

before you noticed the dullness in my eyes
and I, the emptiness of your mouth,
before the art of saying nothing
in a mountain of words
interrupted our conversation.

In those days, my friend,
martyrs were left unburied,
heroes were coffined alive or fled.
Our tears remained unshed:
we did not know they had died.
No one told us who had gone.
These tears, my friend, are wrung
from a heart shattered
by the apocalypse
That was Napolo.

THE AFTERMATH

Mlauli's tomb roared again:
"Mphirimo! Mphirimo! Mphiri-!"
The snarl of brakes strangled the sepulchral voice,
boots crunched the gravel,
and muzzles of machine guns
confronted the dawn.
Napolo was here
to stay.

II. NAPOLO METAMORPHOSIS THE METAMORPHOSIS

It glared at us in the dailies,
scorched the telephone wires,
was screamed over the radio,

we heard it from breathless mouths,
the whirlwind uprooted the rooftops,
to hurl it round our heads.
The metamorphosis of Napolo
needed no Mlauli's sepulchre
to announce the return.

The man in the loincloth also
discarded the trappings
of his profession.
Bark cloth was no longer
considered appropriate
and oracular voice too faint
to be heard above the tumult
of expectancy.
Field green replaced bark cloth,
the diving rod
thundered fire and smoke.
The nation held its breath:
there had been nothing like it before.
A lifetime of spiritual somnolence,
intellectual malnutrition,
improvised existence,
pressurised underdevelopment,
programmed exploitation,
needed Napolo to rouse it.

NAPOLOGIA

The man advised: to see
the teeth of Napolo is patience;
wait until Napolo has gone
and ululate: I am blessed.

The youth answered:
the goat that delayed
got the lash on its behind;
when the sun shrines
one knows Napolo has gone.
This is the time to rejoice.

The man warned:
the weather is like genitals,
it suddenly changes – don't trust it.
The youth retorted:
when you have husbanded lightning
you do not quake at the flashes,
and he who cries for rain
cries for mud too – if not Napolo.

Son, a stranger dies not beat the drum.
Father the fool beat the drum while
the clever one danced.

- You know, two cocks do not crow
under the same roof.
- No, but a cock does not crow away from home.

The man exhorted:
the arrow that takes long in aiming
suddenly falls in the eye.
The youth replied:
the bird had perched right on the bow,
so we could not kill it.
Then the man admonished:
to punish a monkey
you do not arrow it:
smash its head.

The youth was silent.

The man concluded:
the old dog does not scratch in vain;
the words of the elders
are appreciated only
with the passage of Napolo;
the river Tinkanena
flows into Siizi.

But the youth had the last word:
old pepper is never hot;
tough luck for the old stalk,
the maize cob waits for
the fire – next time!

THE SONS OF NAPOLO

We danced the Ingoma
in worsted wool and crimplene,
shoes strapped to out jiggered soles.
The shields we carried
were emblazoned with a motto
written in a foreign tongue.

We danced Nyau steps
to the rhythm of rock 'n' roll:
sycophants to the frenzied music
of our adopted forefathers.

We put tithes
not into extortionate offertory baskets
but bottomless terylene pockets.
The sign of the cross
confused the clapping of hands;

the amens drowned
the ululation to our new gods.
Religiously paying homage
to the four wheels of a Benz;
worshipping images,
grimacing our passwords,
and our passports to survival
in the continual emasculation of existence.

We bared our teeth in complicity
with the daylight sacrilege,
and joined fervently
in the dehumanized chants
of the new dispensation,
under the chilling, pious eye
of the guardian of our traditions.

Moral elephantiasis
is infectious, my friend.
He who guards the well
does not die of thirst;
and if you can't beat 'em
join 'em.

III. NAPOLO: IN THE BEGINNING

Seeds cracked in the sultry afternoon,
the desiccated undergrowth sizzled,
stifling new life in its pods,
twigs snapped,
wilting trees panted in the long drought.

Ambuye.

Pepa.

Akumasoka.

Pepa.

Akumizimu.

Pepa.

For seven nights
your sons have not known their wives.

Pepa.

For seven nights
your daughters have not seen the moon

Pepa.

For seven nights
have we purified ourselves.

Pepa.

Listen, then, to the cries
of your sons and daughters.

Eyes downcast,
the virgin placed the basket of flour
beside the pot of beer and withdrew.
The *nsolo* tree rusted its leaves.
The man in the loincloth,
arms raised, listened.

A yawn and gentle stirring,
Changula had opened his eyes.

Li Li Li

The blast bowed the trees,
genuflecting grass remained

on bended knees.

Phiti Phiti Phiti

Changula, forerunner of Napolo,
opened his mouth wide,
howled down the mountain slope,
spun the trees and grass on their heels
to rocking attention,
as the whirlwind,
writhing on its head,
stripped and assaulted
all in its path
and sped on.

Stillness.

Then the air resounded
with thunder and lightning,
earth's mouth gaped wide.
Trees, boulders, villages,
were sucked into its entrails,
ground and ejected down river.
Heads, arms, legs, chests,
disembowelled earth churned
in the furious current.

The earth bled,
reeked of mud and mangled flesh,
guts bubbled in the torrent

Gubudu Gududu

Gubudu Gududu

Zomba detonated its boulders
and blasted a pathway

down its slope.
Mulungusi was born:
Napolo has decreed it.
(2009: 1-11)

“Four ways of Dying”

The celebrants chanted
to the reluctant martyrs-to-be:
we would have a blood sacrifice!

The Crab’s response:

I crawl

in my shell sideways,
backwards,
forwards

Avoid

direct action on public matters,
confrontation,
commitment;

Meander

to confuse direction or purpose,
meaning,
sense;

Squat

to balance the issues,
weigh,
consider.

The Chameleon’s answer:

Until I have exhausted my wardrobe,

lost my dye to a transparent nothingness,
free of reflection, true to my image,
I'll match my colors with yours,
snake my tongue out to your fears,
bare my teeth to puncture your hopes,
tread warily past your nightmares,
curl my tail round your sanctuaries,
clasp my pincer legs on your veins,
to listen to your heart beat.

The Mole's descent:

Wormlike I build in the entrails of the earth,
fashion intricate passages and halls,
tunnel Utopias and underground Edens,
substitute surface with subterranean vision,
level upon level of meaning of existence,
as I sink downward in my labyrinth,
to die in a catacomb of my own making.

The Kalilombe's ascent:

The gestation and questioning are over,
I'm restless with impatient foetuses,
belly-full with a profusion of conundrums.
My pilgrimage takes me to the cradle,
the *nsolo* tree, the lie-in of man's hopes.
I grit my teeth, grab the slippery surface
and hoist myself up the nation's trunk.
On the topmost branch I have momentary
possession of eternity whirling in the chaosis,
with the deathsong floating from my lips,
I fling myself down on Kaphirintiwa rock
as multivarious forms of art and life

issue out from the convulsions
of the ruptured womb;
and thus I die.
(2009: 19-21)

“Three Songs”

Tell me how a spirit dies.
Do worms claw at its flesh?
Spiders maul the skeleton?
And mold grow out of the heap?

I.) The Wandering Spirit

The spirit in sojourn strains in its sanctuary,
musing at the voices riding the crest of the whirlwind.
Go, child, they whisper, but do not linger at the
crossroads
when darkness is unsheathed to slay the sun’s rays
and the jackal leaves his lair to howl in the wake.

But how was I to know the spirits also walked abroad
when the stars flickered and masked their faces
at the sound of the solitary caller’s steps in darkness?
And I, too, clothed in the silken coat of darkness?

I gazed into the eddies of darkness wearing webs of
silence
as the waves of night wound a cocoon round my soul
and sinews of sorrow stretched before me to brood
against the support darkness had wrought and bred.
Does darkness wear mantles of happiness, too,

which, unbuttoned, reveal wreathes of smiles
meeting fellow spirits in the whirlwind?

Yet I would rip these walls,
rend the shrouds to shreds
and leap into the chaos.

What god, tell me,
would say LET NOT MEN DIE
and give the message to the chameleon?

What god, tell me,
would say LET MEN DIE
and give the message to the lizard?

What man, tell me,
would receive one and reject the other?
What man could cling to both?

Yet I have seen the way strewn with corpses by the
roadside;
joy and friendship mangled, abandoned to rot in the
bushes;
tortured spirits and broken skeletons weeping in the
wind:
arrow points of anguish and clubs of malice hardening
the heart
till tumors of fear burst searing notches of dread in the
soul.

II.) The Dead

Straining against the shrouds smothering us;

breaking the ropes and mats mooring us;
scattering worms and mold from our rotting flesh;
rupturing mounds and walking the same way
we took when leaving mankind for our resting places,
we march by the shafts of early morning,
piercing the horizon to mingle with the living,
one hand holding man's lump of guilt in a potsherd,
the other carrying branches to fend off flies from the
burden.

But what music meets the membrane of our return?

You with the potsherds:
vanish from our sight,
your home is the grave.
Why did you come back?

It is true we died long ago and they buried us.
Alongside our lives they laid also their memory and guilt;
but we had hoped at this hour, this time of reunion,
we would unload our burden and dance, glad of the relief.
Yet their fingers point at us and the song rings in our
ears:

You, Mangadzi, and you, Mbona,
return to your graves.
When we swept the dancing site,
we were not singing your names.

We walk back the same way: the only funeral songs
our own anguish, faltering footsteps and buzzing flies;
back to the *nkebadzi* trees burdened with humiliation
at least the earth will not reject us in revulsion,
nor the worms and spiders we abandoned in our coffins.

Come, mold, sprout on the worms breeding under the
shrouds
and the spiders weaving knotworks in the wood;
muzzle our mouths forever and let only the jackal howl
here.
Come, rot, still our skeletons weeping to the winds
overhead;
bury us deeper in our graves and stand guard over the
mounds.

III.) The Living

Emerging from the murky depths of Maravi pool at
noontime,
after drinking the dregs of yesteryear's draught,
I saw Mphambe riding the barbed arrows of lightning,
his flashing eyes beating jagged flame-ways in the
firmament,
and each stride scorching the earth beneath him in
cinders.

Listening to the lament of the living in the embrace of
woe,
I heard the strain smothering the tattoo of the sacred
drum.
I did not think after this Mbiriwiri would send more
oracles.
Indeed the drum that weeps loudest is soonest burst.
Had I not heard the moaning of the skin at the seams?

Oh, how scarlet-stained the sacred forests of Msinja!
The toilet at Mandevu's grocery-and-bar was knee-deep.
In the aftermath of Mphambe's thunder there was silence,

yet in the silence I saw words sprouting on spearheads
and dancing to the rhythm of demented wardrums.

Words:

tell me what we did in the year of the locusts.

I can't remember.

Don't you remember Napolo?

What is Napolo?

Words:

Promise you won't tell my husband.

Of course not. How could I?

Njala, bwana, tandipatseni

aani tambala yokha, pulizi.

Words:

the shrine at Msinja has no verandah or eaves;

how can I seek refuge even in the shadows

of the granite-faced imprints of Kaphirintiwa?

So lend me a hoe to dig myself a sanctuary.

I heard the python crowing at the rainbow's earthing,
and saw him painting the archway red, yellow, and blue,
and I wondered how a spirit does: Do worms claw at its
flesh,

spiders maul the skeleton, and mold grow out of the
heap?

The voices whispering in the whirlwind scorn mortality.

(2009: 32-36)

“Zomba Mountain”

Great grandfather, founder of the clan,
baskets of spirits under each arm
claimed your slopes for our village.
We spread between the green banks
of two rivers: Naisi and Naming’azi,
planted and reaped in the fields,
played and prayed in the forests,
hurtled and hunted, lived and loved
under the giant gaze of your granite face.

I, too, laden with a pocketful of poems
under each arm, a staked my claim
on your plateau, peaks, pools, and all,
to wrest the wisdom of the ancients
from the myth-infested forests and rivers.

I read your visage like verse:
savoured your similes,
mined your metaphors
wrapped in the roaring rivers
or buried in the bowels of boulders;
deciphered symbols of import
in crag, cranny, or crevice;
scanned cliffs clad in clouds
or rain-laden for fresh inspiration.

Now, great grandfather resurrected
would not recognize your visage.
They blasted your boulders down,
smashing myths to smithereens.

They graded your undergrowth,
mashing water-maids under wheels.
They pulverized the wood spirits,
flattening out their sighs and songs.

Napolo no longer bursts the banks
of Naming'azi, Satemwa, or Naisi;
no myths meander down Mulunguzi;
no lore slithers down the Likangala
past paw steps of lion, leopard, or lizard.
They all vanished into the valley below.

Now the crows fight ants over leftovers
of crumbs of cake from the cottages,
or canned beef, beans, or bottled water
from the backpackers on the camping site.
Concrete, steel pipes, plastic, and bricks
sprout in banks, boulders, and pathways.

Still, the cliffs cleave the skies,
split the sunset into shafts
of red, orange, purple, and blue
doing a dying dance on your brows
sending the slopes to early sleep,
blanketing the town and villages below
in a premature foliage of darkness.
This you will never surrender to man.
This my great grandfather would recognize.
(2009: 94-96)

“The Artists Cenotaph”

I arm myself with the mountains,
the mighty massif of Mulanje pea,
the granite face of Zomba plateau,
the undulating flanks of the Nyika.

I wash my soul and body clean
with the waters of the Shire and Ruvo,
Mulunguzi, Linthipe and Lilongwe,
Lingadzi, Bua, Rukuru, and Songwe.

I wear the garments of the *kalilombe*,
don the camouflage of her lineaments.
My eyes swell with welling tears,
my chest churns out lamentations.

May this song exorcise the souls
and excise from our spirits the anguish
of the *aluso* languishing in temporary graves,
all awaiting final repose at the artists' cenotaph.

BUILDING THE CENOTAPH

The artists' cenotaph is in Nyakalambo,
built out of the bones of dead artists,
built for *mlakatuli* and the *mmisiri*,
dedicated to *apalu* and all *alembi*.

This corner of the fabled forest of old
houses all the dead *aluso* of the land,
so why should our lately dead artists
not join the ancient artificers too?

The stone and woodcarvers of the land
labored here for days, weeks and months,
chipping, adzing, scraping and polishing
from the foundation to the high roof.

The python slithers round the flanks,
licking all the corners to shiny smoothness.
The head rears tall and mighty at the top,
as high as the spirit-ridden Sapitwa.

The sturdy ribs intertwine and interleave
with dancers and drummers around a shrine
overgrown with *njale* and *nsangu* trees;
on every leaf perches a *machete* bird.

On every branch hangs a *kalilombe*,
her tail curled round a giant obituary
written by all the artificers of the land;
her hands hold dirges, elegies and laments.

CANDIDATES FOR THE CENOTAPH

Chiromo, child of *chiaroscuro*,
your blood spattered by the roadside
as the school of *impasto* impacted,
shivered, shattered and starred on tar.

Chiwalo, your heart was larger than
your body as you pumped your mighty
GMPG hand on stage and on radio –
the man of many parts really is no more.

Chisiza Jr, deceased so suddenly,
as if you had a contract with death,
to scrap the last inspiration so early.
Your journey ended at dolorous death's door.

Yekha, the blind troubadour of the south,
You're not so lonely: you have followers.
Madolo, the doyen of the funny flute,
your tunes float to humor us no more.

It is for you the cenotaph was built,
to rest in peace with kindred spirits.
Stars stand aside; shine and stare at
this magnificent monument to genius.

EPILOGUE

We gathered kindred spirits from afar,
paid homage to the shrines of the north,
bathed our feet at Msinja in the centre,
washed our hands at Ndione in the south.

Makewana gathered her kindred deities too,
Mwali, Salima, Chisumphu and Chiuta.
Not to be left out were Napolo and Chiluwe,
Akumidima, akumatsoka, and akumizimu.

We sang symphonies of the spheres
as we ringed round the artists' cenotaph,
and the *aluso* sang back to us in tongues:
WE ARE NOT DEAD! OUR WORKS LIVE ON!
(2009: 114-117)

“A Word on Poetry”

Poetry,
invigorates after
assaulting you out of the lethargy of apathy
and complacency
paralyzing with the terror of the unexpected
probing into the rusted joints of the mind:
oiling as it scrapes
tantalizing with an elusive image
writhing on its head
flagellating to
a yelp of pain
a snarl of anger
a squirm of uneasiness
a smile of satiety
a moan of a heart stroked to tautness.

Poetry
rejuvenates after
leading a “hairy thicket of words”
galvanizing nerve endings to a quivering
mass of anticipation
inviting tactile exploitation where the
 other sense are feeding
erecting even the hairs on their toes to
violent participation
leaving you spent and gasping faintly:
“no more – not just yet.”
(2009: 147)

Malawian Myths

A creation myth

- Taken from a Chewa speaking region in southern Malawi, the knowledge of death is delivered to humankind by Lizard:

After God had created everything He wanted to establish whether death would be eternal or if life would return again. So God sent chameleon ('bilimankhwe')²⁵⁶ to tell the humans that even if they die they shall come back to life. Chameleon set off, but he was slow. As chameleon walked, lizard ('gulo')²⁵⁷ was told to take the message that if death occurs it will be forever. Lizard was much faster than Chameleon and arrived first to the humans with his message of eternal death. Humans are forever angry with the chameleon because he was too slow delivering his message.²⁵⁸

Frog and Ebony Beauty

Two men in a village make friends with Frog, a renowned carver. The three always work together on various projects. Every time they go out to cut poles or grass for their houses, they bring home bundles. And each sings to his wife to help him unload his bundle. But Frog sings to

²⁵⁶ There are different chameleons in Malawi. A variety of names are used. 'Bilimankhwe' is one, which has huge eyes, and 'Kalilombe' is a large chameleon. See Morris (2000).

²⁵⁷ 'Gulo' is 'lizard' in Chichewa; it is large with a blue head and runs quickly. See Van Breugel (2001)

²⁵⁸ I have heard this myth a number of times. For example: Kanuka (16th September 2010) Variations are widely documented: see "Lizard and the Cause of Eternal Death" in Schoffeleers and Roscoe for example (1985: 23-24); Van Breugel (2001: 36-37); Morris (2000; 179).

his mother as he is not married. The two men always mock Frog for this, after all they are all of marriageable age.

One day when Frog is angered by his friend's mockery he goes into the forest alone and does not return for some time. There he carves a beautiful woman from the heart of a sacred ebony tree. He sticks a pin on the woman's head turning her into a human being. They return home married secretly.

The next time the three friends go out to work they bring home bundles of grass, and Frog sings to his wife to help him carry the grass. The two friends are amused at first but later become so envious at the sight of the beauty of Frog's wife that next day they tell the Chief about it. He sends his army to kill or capture Frog and bring the beauty to him. But Fly overhears the plot and flies to warn Frog of the impending danger.

Frog runs into the forest where he assembles birds, animals, and other creatures and with them plans the rescue of his wife. Dove is chosen to lead the attack by singing a melodious song.²⁵⁹ Hawk is chosen for his speed and the rest follow Frog. The forest crowd soon gathers at the Chief's palace in a great commotion. The Chief decides to see what the crowd is up to. Suddenly all is quiet. Dove sings his most melodious song. The Chief invites his bride to listen to this lovely music. As they come out of their palace, Hawk, with the speed of lightning, swoops down and picks the pin from the beauty. The Beauty becomes wood again.

(Mapanje 1981: 78)

The Wagtail Saves Man from Extinction

Not long after the world had been created, the lion, the hyena, and the dog held a secret meeting at which they decided to ask Chinta or God to grant them a wish. On their way they met a wagtail who asked them

²⁵⁹ Dove symbolises the Artist in Malawi: the innovative, revolutionary role played. See Mthathiwa (2009).

about their journey. They told him they were on their way to see Chiuta – without, however, revealing their true purpose.

The wagtail, sensing danger, decided to travel with them under the pretext that he too wanted an audience with the Almighty. As soon as they arrived in heaven they were admitted into Chiuta's presence and after reverential greetings the dog began to speak. "Master of us all", he said, "I have come to complain about my small stature. I am sure that it is within your power to make me larger than I am now". The hyena came next and complained of his lack of strength and courage which prevented him from fighting the bigger animals.

The lion brought to Chiuta's attention the fact that, although he was the strongest and most ferocious animal, to whom everybody showed respect, he was, in comparison with them, almost infertile, and therefore wanted more children. The wagtail spoke last. "Your Greatness", he said, "before you grant the petitions of my companions, I would like to point out the consequences of such a decision. If you allow the dog to be bigger, he will be stronger than man and eat all his food. Man will thus starve to death. The hyena, when stronger than now, will break into cattle kraals and goat pens and finish off all the domestic animals. Finally, if you allow the lion to multiply more than he does now, there will soon not be a single human left on earth. I need not to tell you that all mankind will rise in anger against you, if you grant these animals their wishes".

Now the Almighty spoke. "Wagtail", he said, "you are wise, and I shall follow your advice. None of these petitions will be granted. I urge you all to be content with what you received on the day of creation". On their way home the three animals kept barking and roaring at the wagtail, who flew from branch to branch above their heads well out of reach. This is why the wagtail always warns men when lions, snakes, or other dangerous creatures are in the neighbourhood.

(Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985: 225)

Bibliography

Books and Journals

- Achebe. C., 1986. *Arrow of God*. Heinemann: London.
- Achebe. C., 1989. *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-87*. Heinemann: Oxford.
- Achebe. C., 2000. *Home and Exile*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Adu-Gyamfi. Y., 2002. "Orality in Writing: Its Cultural and Political Significance in Wole Soyinka's *Ogun Abibiman*". *Research in African Literatures*, 33 (3). 104–122.
- Amanze. J., 2002. *African Traditional Religion in Malawi: The Case of the Bimbi Cult*. Christian Literature Association in Malawi: Blantyre.
- Appiah. K. A., 1992. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arendt. H., 1973. *The origins of totalitarianism*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York.
- Armah. K-A., 1969. *Fragments*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston.
- Attridge. D., 1999. "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other", *Modern Language Association*. 114 (1). 20-31.
- Bakewell. O., Koser. K., and Martin. S., 2011. *The migration-displacement nexus : patterns, processes, and policies*. Berghahn: New York.
- Barber. K., 1991. *I could speak until tomorrow: oriki, women, and the past in a Yoruba town*. Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington D.C.
- Barber. K., 2007. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

- Beier. U. and Moore. G., 1984. *Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*. Penguin Books: London.
- Bekers. E., Helff. S., and Merolla. D., (eds). 2009. *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, Rodopi: Amsterdam.
- Bender. B., 1993. *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*. Berg: Providence.
- Bender. B. and Winer. M., 2001. *Contested Landscapes: movement, exile and place*. Berg: New York.
- Benjamin.W., 2006. *Walter Benjamin : selected writings*. 4. 1938-1940,Cambridge: Mass.
- Bevan. D., 1990. Literature and exile. Rodophi: Amsterdam.
- Bhabha. H. K., 1990; 1999. *Nation and Narration*. Routledge: London.
- Bhabha. H. K., 1994. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge: London.
- Bhaktin. M.M., 1986. *Speech genres and other late essays*. University of Texas Press: Austin.
- Casey. E., 1976. *Imagining: a phenomenological study*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.
- Chapman. M., 2003. "African Literature, African Literatures: Cultural Practice or Art Practice?" *Research in African Literatures*. 34 (1). 1- 10.
- Chennels. A. J. and Veit-Wild. F., 1999. *Emerging perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*. Africa World Press: Trenton.
- Chimombo. S., 1981. *The Rainmaker*. Popular Publications: Limbe.
- Chimombo. S., 1983. *Wachiona Ndani?* Dzuka Publications: Blantyre.
- Chimombo. S., 1987; 2009. *Napolo Poems*. Manchichi Publishing Company: Zomba.
- Chimombo. S., 1988. *Malawian oral literature: the aesthetics of indigenous arts*.University of Malawi: Zomba.

- Chimombo., S. 1988. "The chameleon in lore life and literature – the Poetry of Jack Mapanje", *The Journal of commonwealth literature*. 23 (1). 102-115.
- Chimombo. S., 1990. *The Basket Girl*. Popular Publications: Limbe.
- Chimombo. S., 1992. *Python! Python!* WASI: Domasi.
- Chimombo. S., 1994. *Napolo and the Python: Selected poems*. Heinemann: Oxford.
- Chimombo. S., 1994. *The Election of the Forest Creatures*. WASI: Zomba.
- Chimombo. S. and Chimombo. M., 1996. *The Culture of Democracy: Language, Literature, the Arts and Politics in Malawi, 1992-94*. WASI Publications: Zomba.
- Chimombo. S., 1996. *A Guide to Malawi's Literature*. Manchichi: Zomba.
- Chimombo. S., 2000. *The Wrath of Napolo*. WASI Publications: Zomba.
- Chimombo. S., 2006. *The Hyena Wears Darkness*. WASI: Zomba.
- Chimombo. S., (eds). 2009. "*WASI*" magazine. Writers & Artists Services International: Zomba. 19 (2).
- Chipasula. F., 1972. *Visions and Reflections*. National Educational: Lusaka.
- Chipasula. F., 1984. *O Earth, Wait for Me*. South Africa: Ravan Press Ltd.
- Chipasula. F., 1986. *Nightwatcher, Nightsong*. P. Green: Peterborough.
- Chipasula. F., 1991. *Whispers in the wings*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. London.
- Chipasula. F. and Chipasula. S., 1995. *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry*. Heinemann: Oxford.

- Chirambo. R. M., 2007. "Protesting Politics of 'Death and Darkness' in Malawi", *Journal of Folklore Research*. 38 (3). 205-227.
- Coetzee. P. H. And Roux. A. P. J., (1998). *The African Philosophy reader*. Routledge: London.
- Collier. G., (eds). 1992. *Us/ Them: Translation, Transcription and Identity in Post-Colonial Literary Cultures*. Rodopi: Amsterdam.
- Cook. D., (eds). 1965. *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.: London.
- Dickinson. E. and Franklin. R. W., 1999. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Belknap Press: Cambridge.
- Douglas. M., 1991. "The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space", *Social Research*. 58 (1). 287-307.
- Du Bois. W.E.B., 1969. *The souls of black folk*. New American Library: New York.
- Eades. J. S., 1980. *The Yoruba today*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Englund. H., 1998. "Death, trauma and ritual: Mozambican Refugees in Malawi", *Social Science and Medicine*, 46 (9). 1165 -1174.
- Englund. H., 2001. *A democracy of chameleons: politics and culture in the New Malawi*. Nordiska Afrikainstitute: Sweden.
- Englund. H., 2002. "The Village in the City, the City in the Village: Migrants in Lilongwe. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 28 (1).137-154.
- Englund. H., 2011. *Human rights and African airwaves: mediating equality on the Chichewa radio*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.
- Feld. S. and Basso. K.H., 1996. *Senses of Place*. University of Washington: Santa FE.

- Feldman. I., 2006. "Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza", *History and Memory*. 18 (2). 10-47.
- Ferguson. J., 2013. "Declarations of dependence: labour, personhood, and welfare in southern Africa", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 19.
- Field, S., Meyer, R., and Swanson, F., (eds). 2007. *Imagining the City: Memories and Cultures in Cape Town*. HRSC Press: Cape Town.
- Flanagan. K., and Jupp. P. C., 2007. *A sociology of Spirituality*. Ashgate: England.
- Frederiksen. B. F. and Sørensen. N. N., 2002. *Beyond Home and Exile: Making Sense of Lives on the Move*. Roskilde University: Denmark.
- Forster. P. G., 1994. "Culture, Nationalism, and the Invention of Tradition in Malawi", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 32 (3). 477-497.
- Foucault. M., 1982. "The Subject and Power", *Critical Inquiry*. 777-795.
- Foucault. M., (trans. R. Hurley.), 1990, *The History of Sexuality*, New York: Vintage.
- Furman. R., "Poetry and Narrative as Qualitative Data", *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 2007; P 1-9.
- Gibbs. J., 1976. *Nine Malawian Plays*. Popular Publications: Limbe.
- Gieryn. T. F., 2000. "A Space for Place in Sociology", *Annual Review Sociology*. 26. 463-496.
- Gozdziak. E. M. and Shandy. D. J., 2002. "Editorial Introduction: Religion and Spirituality in Forced Migration", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15 (2).
- Gupta. A., and Ferguson. J., (eds) 1997. "Discipline and practice: "The field" as Site, method, and Location in

- Anthropology”, *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Gutthy. A., 2009. *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*. Lang: New York.
- Halbwachs. M., 1950; 1980. *The Collective Memory*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Hall. D. E., 2004. *Subjectivity*. Routledge: London.
- Hallam. E. and Ingold. T., (eds). 2007. *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. Berg: New York.
- Hammar. A. and Rodgers. G., 2008. “Introduction: Notes on political economies of displacement in southern Africa”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26(4). 355-370.
- Hegel. G. W. F., 1977. (eds). *Phenomenology of spirit*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Hidalgo. C. P., 1994. Filipino Woman Writing: *Home and Exile in the Autobiographical Narratives of Ten Writers*. Manila University Press: Philippines.
- Howard, A. M., 2010. “Actors, places, regions, and global forces: An essay on the spatial history of Africa since 1700”, in Engel and Nugent., (eds.). *Re-spacing Africa*. Brill: Leiden.
- Jackson. M., 1995. *At home in the world*. Duke University Press: Durham.
- Jones. E. D., 1973. *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*. Heinemann: London.
- Jones. A. and Manda. D. L., 2006.”Violence and ‘othering’ in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa: Case study: Banda’s Malawi”, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. 18 (2).
- Jones. J. L., 2010. “Nothing is Straight in Zimbabwe’: The Rise of the Kukiya-kiya Economy 2000-2008”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36 (2). 285-299.

- Jones. R., 2011. "Nigerian 'Third Generation' writing and the idea of home in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*", *African Renaissance*. 8 (2).
- Kant. I., 1964. *Critique of pure reason*. Macmillan: London.
- Kaphagawani. D. N., "Themes in a Chewa Epistemology", in Coetzee, P. H., and Roux. A. P. J., 1998. *The African Philosophy Reader*. Routledge: London.
- Kayira. L., 1967. *The Looming Shadow*. Longmans: London.
- Kayira. L., 1974. *The Detainee*. Heinemann: London.
- Keith. M. and Pile. S., 1993. *Place and the politics of identity*. Routledge: London.
- King. R., Connell. J., and White. P., 1995. *Writing across Worlds: Literature and Migration*. Routledge: London & New York.
- King. N., 2000. *Memory, narrative, identity: remembering the self*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh.
- Kumakanga. S., 1996. *Nzèru Zakale*. Longman: Lusaka.
- Kundera. M., 1984. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Harper & Row: New York.
- Lahiri. S., (eds). 2001. *Inhabiting the Other: Essays on Literature and Exile*. Aryan Books International: New Delhi.
- Lamming. G., 1992. *The Pleasures of Exile*. University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor.
- Lee. C. J., 2010. "Malawian Literature after Banda and in the Age of AIDS: A Conversation with Steve Chimombo", *Research in African Literatures*. 41 (3). 33-48.
- Lefebvre. H., 1991. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Lindley. A., 2010. "Leaving Mogadishu: Towards a Sociology of Conflict-Related Mobility", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23 (1), 2-22.
- Lovell. N., 1998. *Locality and Belonging*. Routledge: London.

- Lwanda. J., 2008. "Poets, culture and orature: A reappraisal of the Malawi political public sphere, 1953-2006", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 26 (1). 71-101.
- Maalouf. A., 2000. *On Identity*. Bookmarque Ltd: Great Britain.
- Magalasi. M., 2000. "Landscape and National Memory in Steve Chimombo's Napolo Poems", *Transformation*. 44.
- Maja-Pearce. A., (eds). 1990. *The Heinemann Book of Africa Poetry*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd: Oxford.
- Malkki. L., 1995. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Malkki. L., 1996. "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization", *Cultural Anthropology*, 11 (3). 377-404.
- Mapanje. J., 1981. *Of Chameleons and Gods*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd: London.
- Mapanje. J., 1993. *The chattering wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*. Heinemann: Oxford.
- Mapanje. J., 1998. *Skippping without Ropes*. Bloodaxe Books: Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Mapanje. J., 2004. *The Last of the Sweet Bananas: New and selected poems*. Bloodaxe Books: Northumberland.
- Mapanje. J., 2007. *Beasts of Nalunga*. Bloodaxe Books: Northumberland.
- Mapanje. J., 2011. *And Crocodiles are Hungry at Night*. Arts Council England: London.
- Marachera. D., 1978; 2009. *The House of Hunger*. Heinemann: Oxford.
- Mascuch. M. 1996. *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Massey. D., 2005. *For Space*, London: Sage.

- Merchant. P., 1977. *The epic*. Methuen: London.
- Mnthali. F., 1980. *When Sunset comes to Sapitwa*. Kenneth Kaunda Foundation: Lusaka.
- Mnthali. F., 1992. *My Dear Anniversary*. Longman.
- Morris. B., 2000. *Animals and Ancestors: An Ethnography*. Berg: Oxford.
- Morris. B., 2000. *The Power of Animals: An Ethnography*. Berg: Oxford.
- Morris. B., 2008. *Wildlife And Landscapes In Malawi: Selected Essays On Natural History*. Trafford Publishing: Canada.
- Morrison. T., 1987. *Beloved*, Vintage: Great Britain.
- Morrison. T., 1992. *Playing in the Dark*, Picador: London.
- Morrison. T., 2003. *Love*. Knopf: New York.
- Morrison. T., 2012. *Home*. Knopf: New York.
- Morton-Williams. P., Bascom. W. and McClelland. E.M., 1966. "Two Studies of Ifa Divination", *Africa*. 36 (4). 406-431.
- Moto. F., 1999. *Trends in Malawian Literature*. Zomba: Chancellor College Publications.
- Mphande. L., 1996. "Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Writers Group: The (un)Making of a Cultural Tradition", *Research in African Literatures*. 27 (1). 80-101.
- Mphande. L., 1998. *Crackle at Midnight*. Heinemann Educational Books: Nigeria.
- Mthatiwa. S., 2007. "The Depiction of Forests/ Trees and Malawi's Rural Landscape in the Poetry of Lupenga Mphande and Zondiwe Mbano", *Alternation*. 14 (2).
- Mthatiwa. S., 2009. "Bird Metaphors in Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* and *Skipping Without Ropes*", *Alternation*. 16 (2).
- Mthatiwa. S., 2011. *Human-Animal Relationships and Ecocriticism: A Study of the Representation of Animals in Poetry from Malawi*,

- Zimbabwe, and South Africa*. A book submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand: Johannesburg.
- Muoneke. R. O., 1994. *Art rebellion and redemption: a reading of the novels of Chinua Achebe*. Peter Lang publications: New York.
- Naficy, H., 1999. *Home, Exile and Homeland*. Routledge: New York and London.
- Naipaul. V. S., 1987. *The enigma of arrival: a novel*. Knopf: New York.
- Nazombe. A. J. M., 1983. *Malawian Poetry in English from 1970 to the Present Day: A Study of Myth and Socio-political Change in the work of Steve Chimombo, Jack Mapanje, Frank Chipasula and Felix Mnthali*. Sheffield University: Sheffield.
- Nelson. H. D., et.al., 1987. *Malawi: A country study*. The American University: Washington D. C.
- Neuhouser . F., 1990. *Fichte's theory of subjectivity*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Ngara. E., 1990. *Ideology and form in African poetry: implications for communication*. Heinemann: London.
- Nkosi. L., 1983. *Home and exile and other selections*. Longman: London.
- Nora, P., 1989. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de memoire", *Representations*. (26).
- Nthara. S., 1966. *Nthondo*. Nkhoma Synod Church of Central Africa: Malawi.
- Nuttall. S., and Coetzee. C., (eds), 1998. *Negotiating the Past: The making of memory in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Nwoga. D. I., 1979. "Modern African Poetry: The Domestication of a Tradition", *African Literature Today: Retrospect and Prospect*. 10. 32-56.

- Nyamnjoh. F., 2012. "Blinded by Sight: Diving the Future of Anthropology in Africa", *Africa Spectrum*. 47 (2-3). 63 – 92.
- Nyamnjoh. F., 2012. "Intimate Strangers: Connecting Fiction and Ethnography", *Alternation*. 19 (1). 65 – 92.
- O' Ihonvbere. J., 1997. "From Despotism to Democracy: The Rise of Multiparty Politics in Malawi", *Third World Quarterly*. 18 (2) 225.
- Oliphant. A.W., (eds). 1998. *A writing life: Celebrating Nadine Gordimer*. Penguin Group Ltd: London.
- Olwig. K. F. and Hastrup. K., 1997. *Sitting culture: the shifting anthropological object*. Routledge: New York.
- Pachai. B., 1973. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. Longman Group Ltd: London.
- Pass. S., 2012. (3rd ed). *Dictionary Mtanthauziramawu Chichewa/ Chinyanja – English English - Chichewa/ Chinyanja*. VTR Publications: Germany.
- Peterson. K. H., 1988. *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference Stockholm 1986*. Nordiska: Sweden.
- Probst. P., 2002. "Expansion and Enclosure: Ritual Landscapes and the Politics of Space in Central Malawi". *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28 (1). 179-198.
- Radcliffe-Brown. A. R., 1965. *African systems of kinship and marriage*. Oxford University Press: London.
- Rasmussen. S., 2008. *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Roque. S., 2008. "Manuela: A social biography of war displacement and change in Angola", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 26 (4). 371-384.
- Roscoe. A. A. and Msiska. M-H., 1992. *The quiet chameleon: modern poetry from Central Africa*. Hans Zell: London.

- Rubadiri. D., 1967. *No Bride Price*. East African Publishing House: Nairobi.
- Sahlins. M., 2012. *What Kinship is – And is Not*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Said. E., 1978. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books: New York.
- Said. E., 2001. *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. Granta: London.
- Schoffeleers. J. M. and Roscoe. A. A., 1985. *Land of Fire: Oral Literature from Malawi*. Popular Publications: Limbe.
- Schroder. N. S., 2006. *Spaces and Places in Motion: Spatial Concepts in Contemporary American Literature*. Druck und Bindung: Germany.
- Soja. E.W., 1989. *Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*. Verso: New York.
- Sorabji. R., 2006. *Self : ancient and modern insights about individuality, life, and death*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Staiger. U., Steiner, H., and Webber. A., (eds). 2009. *Memory Culture and the Contemporary City*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.
- Strachan. J. and Terry. R., 2000. *Poetry*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh.
- Tuan. Y., 1977. *Space and place: the perspective of experience*. University of Minnesota: Minneapolis.
- Turner. B.S., 1984. *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*. Blackwell: New York.
- Turner. V., 1969. *The Ritual Process*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.
- Vail. L. and White. L., 1990. "Of Chameleons and Paramount Chiefs: The Case of the Malawian Poet Jack Mapanje", *Review of African Political Economy*. 48.

- Van Breugel. J. W. M., 2001.*Chewa Traditional Religion*. Christian Literature Association in Malawi: Blantyre.
- Van Gennep. A., 1922: 1960.*The Rites of Passage*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Wa Thiong'o. N., 1964. *Weep not, child*. Heinemann Educational Books: London.
- Wa Thiong'o. N., 1975. *Secret lives and other stories*. L. Hill: New York.
- Wa Thiongo. N., 1997.*Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dream: the performance of literature and power in post-colonial Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Weil. S., 1949; 2002. *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*. Routledge: London.
- Writers' Group., 1971. *Mau: 39 Poems from Malawi*. University of Malawi: Limbe.

Web:

- Contemporary list of poets in Malawi. Available from: <http://www.poetrysoup.com/poets/Malawian> Accessed on: 25th March 2013
- Hove. C., 2012. *In interview with Harriett Gilbert World Book Club BBC Podcast*. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/wbc/all> Accessed on: 20th August 2013
- Human Rights Watch World Report 1989- Malawi, 1st January 1990. 2013. Available from: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/467bb4921e.html> Accessed on: 19th August 2013.
- John Paul Kayuni Blog. Available from: <http://youthfulmalawianwriters.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06>

- [/silent-cry-by-john-paul-kayuni.html](#) Accessed on: 5th and 20th August 2013
- Lea. R., 2013. *Rhyme and Treason: Interview with the poet Jack Mapanje*. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/aug/31/forwardprizeforpoetry2007.forwardprizeforpoetry> Accessed on: 22nd August 2013.
- Lyer. P., 2013. *Where is home?* Available from: http://www.ted.com/talks/pico_iyer_where_is_home.html?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2013-07-20&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_content=top_right_button Accessed on 29th July 2013; 30th September 2013.
- ‘Malawi’s Cultural Festival Poetry Reading at the Crossroads’. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--td1gTtALk> Accessed on: 25th March 2013
- Malawi Sustainable Development Network Programme: Malawi SDNP. Available from: <http://www.sdn.org.mw/> Accessed on: 2nd August 2013.
- Map, Available from: <http://www.worldofmaps.net/en/africa/map-malawi/map-regions-malawi.htm> Accessed on: 18th October 2013.
- Mapanje. J., 2009. “Swallow for my son at seven: Poem”. *Wasafiri*, 24(4). 37. Available from: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02690050903205926> Accessed on: 28th March 2013.
- Maravi News, April 2013. Available from: <http://www.maravipost.com/scope/op-ed/3584-malawi%E2%80%99s-party-of-%E2%80%98death-and-darkness%E2%80%99-scared-of-%E2%80%98man-of->

god%E2%80%99rev-chakwera.html Accessed on: 19th August 2013.

Okunoye. O., 2004. *The Critical Reception of Modern African Poetry*. Available from: <http://etudesafricaines.revues.org/4817> Accessed on: 13th March 2013; 26th October 2013

Olaoluwa. S. S., 2008. *Introduction: African Poetry and the Politics of Exile: A Critical Survey*. Available from: <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/7201/Inscribing%20Dispersal.pdf> Accessed on: 28th March 2013.

Rose. G., 1996, in Duncan. N., [online]. "BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality". Available from: http://books.google.dk/books?id=78Tq6obW2sQC&printsec=frontcover&dq=rose+in+bodySpace+by+duncan&hl=en&sa=X&ei=ABfDUK6_I47HswaZiYCgBg&ved=0CCoQ6wEwAA#v=onepage&q=rose%20in%20bodySpace%20by%20duncan&f=false Accessed on: 13th March 2013

The 16th Poetry Africa International Poetry Festival: Durban, South Africa, October 2012. Available from: <http://www.cca.ukzn.ac.za/index.php/news/704-16th-poetry-africa-2012-general-press-release.html>. Accessed on: September 2012, and 21st February 2013

The University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Available from: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ncla/people/profile/91107#tab_publications

- UNData: United Nations Statistics Division. 2013. Available from:<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Malawi> Accessed on: 2nd August 2013.
- UNFPA. 2013. Available from: http://unfpamalawi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91&Itemid=157 Accessed on: 2nd August 2013.
- Vermeullen. J., 1979. *Chinyanya-English Dictionary*. Available from:http://www.fenza.org/docs/various/vermeullen_c_hewa_dictionary.pdf Accessed on: 10th September 2013.
- VoiceFlame on 'Voa News' Webpage. Report by Lameck Masina: July 11, 2013. Available from: <http://www.voanews.com/content/malawian-women-share-life-stories/1699922.html> Accessed on: August 5th and August 20th 2013
- WorldBank. Available from: <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/3.12> Accessed on: 2nd August 2013
- Youtube. 2013: *Mnthali on his 80th birthday*. Available from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4D05bkM_9Aw Accessed on: 29th August 2013.

Interviews and Personal Communication

- Chimombo. S., Interviewed by Woods. J., 24th September 2010.
- Englund. H., Interviewed by Woods. J., 25th May 2013.
- Kanuka. M., Interviewed by Woods. J., 16th September 2010.
- Nyamnjoh. F., Interviewed on Skype by Woods. J., 29th July 2013.
- Woods. J., 244865@soas.ac.uk. 30th January 2011. "SOAS", to: Chimombo. S., wasi.sbmcc@yahoo.com

Woods. J., jopowo@hotmail.co.uk. 17th March 2013; 29th July 2013. "Masters Book on Malawian Poetry", to: White. L., landegwhite@gmail.com

Woods. J., jopowo@hotmail.co.uk. 3rd June 2013. "Smuts Lecture", to: Englund. H., hme25@cam.ac.uk

Woods. J., jopowo@hotmail.co.uk. 3rd June 2013; 25th September 2013. "Cambridge";

"Blinded by Sight Debate continues", to: Nyamnjoh. F., nyamnjoh@gmail.com

Presentations/ Lectures

Hemon. A., 2013. "Aleksandar Hemon: Part of London Literature Festival". Presented in the Purcell Room at Southbank Centre: London.

Morrison. T., 2014. "In conversation: Toni Morrison talks to Razia Iqbal". At the Hay Festival: Wales.

Ngozi Adichie. C., 2014. "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in conversation with journalist Synne Rifbjerg". The Black Diamond, The Royal Library: Copenhagen, Denmark.

Nyamnjoh. F., 2013. "Fiction and Reality of Mobility in Africa". Presented at Smuts Commonwealth Lecture: Centre of African Studies: Cambridge.

“JOANNA WOODS’ *FROM HOME AND EXILE* EXPLORES THE MANY DIMENSIONS OF HOME IN THE WORK OF FIVE PROMINENT MALAWIAN POETS. WHILE EVIDENCE OF METICULOUS RESEARCH IS PRESENT IN EVERY PAGE OF THIS BOOK, ITS UNIQUE ACHIEVEMENT IS THE ABILITY TO BRING CONVENTIONAL LITERARY STUDIES – DEPENDENT ON TEXT, CLOSE READING AND INTERPRETATION – INTO CONVERSATION WITH THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL REQUIREMENT OF FIELDWORK.”

HARRY GARUBA, AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

“THE BOOK OFFERS A NEW PERSPECTIVE INTO INTERPRETING AND NEGOTIATING IDEAS ABOUT EXILIC EXPERIENCES OF MALAWI’S CELEBRATED POETS. EXILIC EXPERIENCES AT HOME AND ABROAD REPRESENT A CONTINUUM OF DEHUMANIZING POLITICAL TERRAIN. BEING HOME OR IN EXILE IS NOT JUST ABOUT BEING WITHIN OR WITHOUT SOME FAMILIAR TERRAIN CALLED ‘HOME’, RATHER IT’S ABOUT THE SENSE ONE HAS OF BELONGING, OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION. THE SELECTION OF MALAWI LITERARY GREATS... IS QUITE REVEALING AND PERHAPS SIGNIFICANT SYMBOLICALLY AS A LITERARY ENDEAVOUR.”

DR IGNATIO MALIZANI JIMU, QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGER
(ACADEMIC), NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, MALAWI.

This book is about home. With Malawi as its focus, it seeks to understand ideas about home as expressed through poetry written by Malawians in English. Although African Literatures are studied those of Malawi have not received agreeable attention. This book surveys poetry by five Malawian writers – Felix Mnthali, Frank Chipasula, Jack Mapanje, Lupenga Mphande, and Steve Chimombo. The discussion negotiates scribed experience of exile, engendered by Dr. Banda’s regime, and shows that the selected poets effectively converse with a sense of home, reflecting on its transformations in their work. Interrogating the strict definitions of home, the argument highlights that far from home-less exiles in fact clarify the sense of what ‘home’ is. The manoeuvre is one of thinking towards an unboundaried ‘home’. This book will be of value not only to readers interested in the cultures of Africa but to all those with an interest in worldwide literary phenomena, and ideas therein of home and exile.

JOANNA WOODS was born in the United Kingdom. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in African Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, and a Masters in African Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Between 2008 and 2012, Joanna undertook several research trips in southern Africa, including Malawi. Her interest in ideas about home stems from her own experiences of being in and out of place. She is a literary enthusiast, and is especially attentive to that which emanates from Africa.



Langaa Research & Publishing
Common Initiative Group
P.O. Box 902 Mankon
Bamenda
North West Region
Cameroon

